

PRACTICAL  
DISCOURSES,  
UPON THE  
PERFECTIONS  
AND  
Wonderful Works of God.

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VOL. I.

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SECOND EDITION.

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By THE REV. JOSEPH REEVE. *R*

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## P R E F A C E.

*THE imperfect knowledge men have of the God, who made them, is one great reason, why they take so little pains to serve him. Being destined by the very end of their creation to serve him in this life and to be happy with them in the next, it should be natural for them, one would think, to inquire into the nature of that happiness, and to learn by what means they may make that happiness their own. To a Christian therefore no knowledge can be so useful or so interesting as that of God. For to know God is the first step he has to take towards the happiness he hopes for. From that knowledge he must draw every efficacious motive of serving God with fidelity and truth to the end of life.*

*Yet so strange is the perverseness of human nature, that most Christians in the world seem as unconcerned about any future state of happiness, as tho' they had little interest in it. They*

*appear to know as little of God, as tho' they did not believe in him, and live as inattentive to his service, as tho' his punishments or his rewards, his hatred or his love, were to them a matter of no consequence. Notwithstanding their boast of an enlightened age, they betray a shameful ignorance of the only knowledge, which dignifies a Christian, and makes him truly wise in the eyes of his Creator.*

*With the young and dissipated part of mankind dress and amusement is the great business of life: they read nothing, they know nothing, they will be informed of nothing, that opens their minds to the eternal truths. By your sprightly geniuses a book upon any serious subject is affectedly thrown aside, not to interrupt the fashionable trifles of the day. To the lovers in fine of loose romantic tales, the very title of a Practical Discourse is sufficient to give disgust. Thus thro' a fatal indifference for salvation, and a modish neglect of the divine service, religious duties are fallen into almost general disuse. The industrious search after worldly dissipation in some, the prevailing passion for romance in others, a stupid indolence in many, and a busy idleness*

*in most, allow no time for profitable instruction, or for serious consideration.*

*What purpose therefore is a publication of Practical Discourses upon the divine attributes likely to answer, and who will read it? They, who stand most in need of instruction upon a subject of this sort, most probably will not concern themselves much about it; but others may. It is humbly offered to them both. To the first, that they may have at hand the supply of useful knowledge, whenever they shall be disposed to profit by it: to the second, that they may have the opportunity of improving themselves in a science, wherein they may have already made some progress. For if dignity of argument, if nobleness of thought, if sublimity of sentiment, have powers to affect an attentive reader, he will here find his expectation raised, his heart dilated, his understanding opened, and his will inflamed.*

*When we seriously consider the wonderful creation of the world out of nothing, we magnify the power that created it; when we view the regular order and harmony of nature in all its works we adore the providence that governs  
and*



*and directs it; when we see repenting sinners received into favour again, we bless the mercy that forgives; and when we behold the impenitent condemned, we revere the justice that chastises. These are the great and striking operations, which a God of infinite perfection has wrought among his creatures. They are numerous and distinct, as we see: yet they indicate no multiplicity of parts, and no distinction even of perfections in the principle, which produces them. For God is one unbounded, one indivisible, and one absolute perfection; the one supreme, immutable, immense, and eternal principle of all, that is or that possibly can be. By searching into the nature of this all-perfect Being, and by considering him relatively to the wonderful works he has displayed, we begin to know, as far at least as human understanding can know, what God is; how powerful, how wise, how good, how provident, how merciful, how just.*

*But to complete the knowledge, which every Christian ought to have of God, it is necessary not only to contemplate his absolute perfections, that subsist in the unity of his divine essence, but also to consider the relative perfections, that*  
*exist*

## P R E F A C E.

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*exist between the Three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This knowledge therefore, which in the Christian dispensation has been so explicitly revealed, and is so necessary for salvation, comprises the Trinity as well as the Unity of God. This naturally leads us to the mystery of the Incarnation. To believe in God as is requisite for salvation, we must not only know what God is in himself, but also what he is become for the love of us. From eternity he is God; and in the second Person of the most blessed Trinity he is since become man for our redemption. To elucidate this great truth of Christianity, the author of the Practical Discourses upon the divine attributes, here offers to the public a second volume, upon the Divinity and wonderful Works of Jesus Christ. The works God has wrought for man in the order of grace affect not our outward senses, like those he has wrought in the order of nature. But upon examination they will appear to the true and faithful believer infinitely more wonderful, because infinitely more elevated, above the reach of his natural comprehension.*

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PRACTICAL



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PRACTICAL  
DISCOURSES

UPON THE PERFECTIONS AND

Wonderful Works of God.

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DISCOURSE I.

UPON THE ADVANTAGES OF KNOWING THE PER-  
FECTIONS OF GOD.

*This is life everlasting, that they know Thee  
the only true God. John c. xvii. v. 3.*

THE end of our Creation being no other,  
than to serve God in this life, and  
to enjoy him in the next, it is no less  
our interest to know the excellency of that  
sublime end, for which we are made, than  
it is our duty to employ the means, that  
advance us towards it. To an immortal  
soul nothing is so natural as the desire,  
B and



and nothing so pleasing as the promise, added to the power, of being eternally happy. Being raised by the bounteous hand of his Creator to a rank, little inferior to that of Angels, man meets with nothing in the order of nature here below, so dignified as himself; nothing, but what is meant by a wise Providence to help him on in the attainment of his last end, the full possession of his God in everlasting glory.

To a Christian therefore, who knows his soul to be immortal, who is conscious, that he bears within him the living image and resemblance of God himself, no consideration and no study can be so interesting as that, which leads him to the knowledge of the perfections of God. Those perfections are infinitely great in themselves, and every way amiable in relation to us: at present indeed we can only see them thro' a glass, according to the expression of St. Paul,\* in an obscure manner, as the object of our faith; but in the day of our exaltation we shall behold them openly revealed, as the

crown

\* 1 Cor. xiii.

crown of our hope and completion of our final happiness. To know, to respect, to fear, and to love God is the only great business we have to do in life : to that every other business ought to be subordinate. Without the knowledge and the love of God, no other knowledge, however extensive or sublime, can contribute to our lasting and substantial good.

Let the proud Philosopher examine the whole creation through in his search after knowledge, let him be skilled in every art and science, let him study nature in all its works, let him dive into the deep recesses of the sea, and sift the bowels of the earth ; let him trace the shining orbs and planets in their vast revolutions through the heavens, and number the stars of the firmament. But should he rest there and lift up his mind to nothing higher, something will be still wanting to dignify his knowledge, and to make it profitable unto eternal life. For tho' I should be master of every science, says St. Paul ;\* tho' I

B 2

should

\* 1 Cor. viii.

should be able to disclose the most hidden secrets, and with the certainty of a prophet foretell future events, yet without charity I am nothing in the sight of God. The humble peasant, whose only study is to know, to serve, and honour God by a right intention in all he does, is in the order of grace not only a better, but also a wiser man. The invisible perfections of our great Creator are made manifest to us by the visible beauties of the creation, says the same Apostle to the Romans,\* and from viewing the things that are made, we rise to the knowledge of Him who made them, even so as to adore his eternal power and divinity.

But amidst these evident marks of a God infinitely wise and powerful, what in general are the occupations of men, and what is their study? To what do their thoughts and projects tend? Let us look through the world, and we shall find the greatest part of mankind busily engaged in almost every other employ, but that of serving God. Strongly attached to the goods of  
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\* C. xii.



the earth, they toil after vanity, and seldom extend their wishes beyond the animal gratification of their senses. Their study, their solicitude and schemes are solely fixed on temporal advantages, as if they had no heavenly inheritance to acquire, or as if their hopes of a future life were to perish with them in the grave. Many there are, who fancying, as it seems, that they have nothing to do but to stalk about the earth and to follow their own conceits, trifle away their days in one continued round of dissipation and unprofitable amusements, while others hurry down the torrent of restless desires, and waste themselves in the pursuit of such things only, as serve to irritate their growing passions.

Thus the greater part of Christians live, regardless of the obligations they owe to God, ignorant of his perfections, and careless of the motives, that should excite them to serve him well. Tho' consecrated to him in the sacrament of Baptism, and made thereby the living temples of the Holy Ghost, they know so little of his



divine perfections, that the inscription, which St. Paul found written upon an altar at Athens, *TO THE UNKNOWN GOD*,\* might with as good reason be also written upon their foreheads. For, since their thoughts are principally taken up with earthly delights, and the bent of their inclinations is chiefly turned to such objects as are pleasing to flesh and blood, they fatally neglect the most profitable, the most interesting, and most necessary knowledge for a Christian, which is the knowledge of God.

For this is the knowledge, which opens our minds to the truths of eternal life, and points out our way to final happiness. Hence the first advantage we derive from it, is to know the object and motive of those essential virtues, which God requires from us; the object and motive of our faith, without which it is impossible to please God; † the motive and object of our hope, without which there is no salvation; ‡ the motive in fine and object of our love, without

\* Acts xvii. † Heb. xi. ‡ Rom. viii.

without which we remain in death. \* Hence we see, that a God of infinite wisdom and veracity is to be implicitly believed in all he teaches, because he can neither deceive, nor be deceived; that from a God of infinite power and benevolence we may confidently hope to receive the reward of our services to him, because he is always faithful in his promises; and that a God of infinite perfection is to be beloved above all things, because he is our sovereign good, and infinitely amiable in himself.

Hence in the second place we learn to respect God, which is another great advantage that results from the consideration of his divine perfections. For when we reflect, that God by his immensity reaches from the highest heavens to the lowermost abyss, that by his omnipresence he comprises the whole universe, and fills every part thereof, that we are always near him, always before him, always in his sight and under the watch of his adorable eye, it is impossible not to respect our sovereign Lord,

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who

\* 1 John iii.

who is always at hand to hear and see every thing that passes both within and about us, who beholds each motion, and knows every secret of our heart more perfectly, than we do ourselves. Under this persuasion we shall be ever upon our guard against every word and action unbecoming the divine sight; and when tempted to sin, we shall be careful not to do in the presence of God, what we should be ashamed of doing in the presence of men. How can I do evil, how shall I dare to sin in the presence of my God,\* said the virtuous Joseph, when pressed for his consent to an action, which the Law forbids? When we reflect, that God is the witness of our conduct in every place and in every circumstance of life, how powerfully are we moved to perform every action well? How studious are we to deserve his good will, how eager to do what is pleasing in his sight? Walk before me, † said Almighty God to Abraham, and be perfect. The obedient Patriarch diligently complied with the wholesome precept, and became

\* Gen. xxxix. † Gen. xvii.



became thereby the pattern of all faithful believers. By the like holy practice we shall also learn to respect the presence of our great God, we shall be animated with fresh zeal in his service, and we shall be warned by a lively fear not to offend him, which is third advantage arising from the consideration of his adorable perfections.

A God infinitely holy detests not only sin, but even the appearance of sin; a God infinitely just has his thunderbolts at hand to crush the hardy sinner, who shall dare to insult his sovereign majesty; a God infinitely powerful can in a moment hurl us down into the bottomless pit of a fiery eternity. At this consideration we are naturally roused into a sense of our duty. A holy fear takes possession of the heart, and awes us into a faithful observance of the divine precepts. Wherefore fear God, says Ecclesiastes,\* and you undoubtedly will keep his commandments. For the fear of the Lord is accompanied with all those spiritual advantages, which open the way to true wis-

B 5

dom.

\* C. xii.



dom. It awakens our attention to the eternal truths, it puts us upon the watch against the enemies of our salvation, it hardens us against the allurements of sin, it blunts the sting of temptation, and, when duty calls, it teaches us to sacrifice every temporal interest, rather than incur the divine anger by any grievous transgression of his holy law.

But the perfect christian is influenced less by fear than by love, in his motive of serving God ; and his love becomes more or less animated according to the knowledge he has of the divine perfections. In the world God is imperfectly served, because he is imperfectly known ; he is loved but by few, because few reflect upon the motives they have of loving him. When the knowledge of his amiable perfections is but faintly traced upon the mind, the affection of the will is too weak to make any impression upon the heart. Had we but a clear perception of a God infinitely amiable, we could not help loving him ; or were we only serious in our application to know him, we should feel ourselves happily impelled not  
only

only to love, but to give proofs of our love in his service. For it is impossible to remain indifferent, when we attentively consider, how God has first loved us, and how liberal he has been of his favours to us. He opens his hand, and showers down the gifts of his benevolence upon every living creature. When we reflect, that this God is as infinitely perfect in himself, as he is infinitely good to man, and that in him is centered the plenitude of all joy and happiness, which an immortal soul can aspire to, we must be void of sentiment not to love him with our whole heart.

The Wise man tells us, that to know God is perfect justice, and to know his justice and his power is the root of immortality.\* Hence the learned Saint Austin in a stile peculiar to himself, but with a zeal common to all good Christians, never ceased to pray for the gift of that sublime knowledge. During the hours of his retirement, at his study, or as he walked along, he would often lift up his heart to God, and by some ejaculatory

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culatory

\* Wisdom, C. xv.

culatory act, which spoke the fervent piety of his soul, would earnestly beg the Holy Ghost to enlighten his understanding, being well convinced, that by knowing God he should be effectually moved to love him. O grant me the grace to know thee, he would frequently cry out in the transport of sweet devotion, grant me, dearest Lord, the grace to love thee! Let me know thee, O my God, and I shall love thee! For the knowledge of thy amiable perfections must necessarily call forth all the powers of my soul to adore, to love, and to serve thee.

This knowledge of God, and this consideration of the perfections of God is moreover the source of many other advantages equally conducive to our eternal good. For the more we know of the perfections of God, the less liable we are to be seduced by the imperfections of creatures. One single ray of divine light is enough to dispel the cloud, which the love of worldly delights often throws upon the mind, and to show us at once the vanity and emptiness of all human greatness. Vanity of vanities, said Ecclesiastes,



Ecclesiastes,\* all is vanity and affliction of the soul, except to love God and to serve him alone. If by considering the adorable majesty of God we learn to respect him, we shall be no longer withheld from his service by any human respects ; but free from the humiliating and disgraceful fetters of worldly servitude we shall enjoy that noble, that desirable liberty, which is peculiar to the dutiful children of God. If by considering the tremendous justice of God we are excited to fear him, we then shall fear nothing else. No threats of men, no storms of persecution, nor poverty, nor sickness, nor adversity, nor the sword, nor even death itself can intimidate the faithful Christian, or deter him from the duty, which he owes to God. If by considering the ineffable goodness of God we are effectually moved to love and serve him, we then are happy even in this life, as from thence we may confidently hope of being eternally happy in the next. For the love we bear to God during our pilgrimage on earth, is a comfortable pledge of  
of

of that incomprehensible felicity, which is reserved for us in Heaven.

Having thus discovered the salutary spring, from which such blessings flow, let us refresh and strengthen our languishing souls with the streams thereof. For as the hart pants after the fountains of waters, says the Psalmist,\* so does my soul, O God, pant after thee. Lifted on the wings of heavenly knowledge, which a calm consideration of the divine perfections will furnish us with, we shall soar in thought above all that is created; we shall have nothing in view, but what is immortal. Our attention will be fixed on the sublime objects of faith, our hearts will glow with the fire of perfect charity, and our ardent wish will be to see those glorious perfections of the divinity revealed, which constitute the happiness of saints and angels. To contemplate God, to praise and glorify God is the happy occupation of the Blessed in heaven, and whilst we employ our mental powers in the same holy exercise, as far as weak mortality

\* Psalm xli,

tality will permit, we begin to do in time, what we hope will be our happiness to do through all eternity. For by the obscure but certain guidance of divine faith our souls are prepared and fitted out to possess him in the brightness of his glory.

But however charming this knowledge of the divine perfections may appear, few Christians are perhaps serious in their endeavours to attain it. Some fancy it too intricate for them to learn it, some too sublime for them to aspire to it, while others think it either incompatible with their occupations in life, or not adapted to the capacity of common mortals. It is a science, they cry, proper only for Saints; and that without a special grace it would be presumption in them to approach the inaccessible light of omnipotence, and to face the throne of glory.

A devout consideration of the divine perfections is within the reach of the meanest capacity. Every Christian, however destitute of human learning, has the capacity of knowing God, of confessing his providence, of admiring his justice, of loving his goodness,



ness, and of adoring his wisdom. In the humble performance of our prayers and other spiritual duties we need no shining talents, no sublime variety of thought, nor any eminent gift of contemplation. To enable us to love and serve God, it is not necessary that we should possess either power, or riches, or learning. Such qualifications may entitle us indeed to some notice in the world, but without humility, without piety and charity, they are of little value in the sight of God.

To those, who are little in their own eyes, our heavenly Father communicates his favours more abundantly, and while he resists the proud, on the humble only he bestows the grace of true wisdom. I give thee thanks, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, says our blessed Saviour,\* because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Therefore to such he makes the most pressing invitation to come and learn at the very source of knowledge itself: approach, says he,

\* Mat. xi.

he, and be enlightened.\* My Brethren, we approach to almighty God by fervent prayer, by holy aspirations, by devout meditation, by a habit in fine of recollecting our thoughts and of uniting our hearts with him, in whose sight we always stand. Thus it was, that the Saints became eminent in all Christian virtues, and thus by treading in the same steps, we shall with them arrive at the same happy term.

God is infinite in power, nor is he less infinite in goodness. His hand is always ready to support us in every difficulty, and his eye is always open for the comfort of those who fear him. By day and by night his providence watches over us; we are always in his presence, whether sleeping or awake, whether in company or alone. Let us often consider his adorable perfections; let us never cease offering to him our thoughts, our affections, and the warmest sentiments of our hearts. God is glorified by such a service; he is pleased with the humble homage of his devout servants, he is attentive

\* Psalm xxxiii.

tive to their wants, and repays their prayers with the effusion of his choicest graces. With sincere humility, but with a lively confidence of success, let us then frequently present ourselves in spirit before the throne of God. In holy contemplation let us there adore his unspeakable perfections, and draw from thence the succours, that are necessary to support and animate our steps towards heaven. Let us dwell in thought on each of the divine perfections, let us humble our hearts before him, and leisurely excite in our souls such affections and such sentiments of gratitude and holy love, as may recommend us to the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation.

DISCOURSE



## DISCOURSE II.

UPON THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

*I am, who am.* Exodus c. iii. v. II.

THE idea of an eternal independent Being is the most exalted notion we can form of an all-perfect God. It is the notion, which God himself has given us of his own unlimited greatness. *I am, who am*, said he to Moses, and *He, who is*, commandeth thee to go, and to lead his people forth from the land of Egypt. God being eternal is anterior to every other Being that exists, and cannot possibly derive the principle of existence from any other than himself. Without beginning and without end he exists necessarily of himself, and as no period of time can ever measure the duration of his existence, so no possible length of ages can ever work the least diminution or increase in the nature of his unlimited perfections.

Immortal indeed are the Angels, and so are the souls of men; but neither the one  
nor

nor the other are eternal. Nor is it owing to any independent perfections of their own, but to the pure liberality of their Creator, that they are even privileged with the grace of immortality. Their nature, it is true, consists of no variety of component parts, and consequently contains no internal cause of dissolution; but being destitute of the principle of self-existence, they continually stand in need of the divine power to preserve them in the life which it first gave. If the Angels are therefore said at any time to be eternal, it is not to be understood in the strict meaning of the word eternal, but in a limited sense only, in as much as they are ordained to have no end, and by the absolute will of the Almighty, who first created them, they will continue to exist eternally. For the idea of eternal in its full extent is by no means applicable to any thing which has had a beginning, and therefore may have an end. Consequently none but God, none but the only one supreme and independent Being, can be truly and properly stiled Eternal, whose greatness knows no bounds,  
 whose

whose perfections are infinite, whose existence has no beginning and will have no end.

The eternity of God has no distinction of parts, it contains no succession of days and years. In each moment, in each instant of time it is undivided and entire. At present it is, what it always was; it is, what it will always be. Millions of years may roll away, they will not shorten its duration, and millions of ages may still succeed, they will add nothing to its length. Eternity is therefore one eternal moment; a moment without beginning, and without end, without diminution and succession. I call it a moment, because in each instant it is whole; and I call it an eternal moment, because it lasts for ever, and will be for ever whole. But when we thus express ourselves, we don't pretend to convey any clear or distinct idea of eternity: the eternity as well as the immensity of God is infinitely more than we can express or even comprehend. The terms, in which we are forced to speak both of the one and of the other, seem little adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding.



standing. The immensity of God is indivisible and unlimited, so is his eternity. By them he wonderfully reaches from end to end, always existing and always present, wholly and not by parts, in every place and in every moment, without the possibility of being ever separated by space or confined by time.

To speak with propriety of the immutable eternity of God, we must open the holy Scriptures, and adopt the language which God himself has there taught us. Before the world was formed, says the royal Prophet,\* before the foundations of the earth were laid, or the date of time was known, O God, thou art, and so shalt thou always be thro' boundless ages for evermore. The heavens and the earth shall pass away; the stars shall fall from the firmament, and the sun be lost in everlasting night; but thou, O Lord, always art the same, and thy years shall never fail. The Prophet Habacuc† is still more sublime in his nobleness of thought, and strength of expression upon the

\* Psalm lxxxix. † Habacuc, C. iii.

this subject. The Almighty stood, says he, and took the dimensions of the earth: he looked and dissolved the nations thereof: the aged mountains mouldered away beneath his feet, and the hills of the world bent with the journeys of his eternity. The Prophet by this energy of language seems to behold the eternity of God pressing upon the hills and mountains of the earth, and crushing them by the weight of rolling ages into their first nothing.

In the eternity of God, says S. Augustin, there is nothing past, nothing yet to come: there is no yesterday or to-morrow, there is but the present moment, and that moment is eternal. Tho' we fancy to ourselves whole millions of years, which may be supposed to have elapsed before the creation of the world, God was then as great, as powerful, and as happy as he now is, and as he will always be. Let us moreover bring to our imagination a still more extensive, and still increasing number of years and ages, successively crowding one upon another; both before and after them we shall find God always

ways reigning in the full bloom of his eternity, always happy in the inexhaustible enjoyment of his own perfections. For he is both prior and posterior to every possible period of time; and tho' that period should be stretched far beyond any length of ages, that the mind of man can reach to, yet in the eye of an eternal Deity it is but as a day, which is already passed.

In the order of nature time is always passing and always changing, like to a broad and rapid torrent, which bears down all that comes within its course: but the eternity of God is always fixed and always the same, equally incapable both of change and motion. Immovable as a rock, it is neither altered by the current, nor wasted by the succession of flowing years, being always whole and lasting in itself without the least diminution or increase in the nature of its existence. For to the perfection of an infinite Being nothing can be added, and from the eternity of an unchangeable Being nothing can be taken away. He was, he is, he will be, nor can he ever cease to be, what he now is, infinite and eternal.

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All creatures are by nature subject to change and decay. The sun may indeed continue on its course for ages yet to come; the rivers may still flow with fresh supplies from their sources to the sea; the noble monuments of art, once erected to the memory of departed heroes, may seem to defy the hand of time; the fame of mighty kings and conquerors may spread thro' the nations of the earth, their actions may excite the envy or the admiration of mankind, and their names may be recorded and descend from age to age, from generation to generation to the latest posterity: yet all will pass away; all will fail at last, and every remnant of human greatness will be blotted out. Within the bosom of the earth every mortal man shall sleep in dust, till a new change of things shall for the last time come on, and then the earth itself shall be no more. But, sitting on his throne of inaccessible glory, and surrounded by millions of immortal spirits, all and each of them glowing with a brightness more resplendent than the sun, God shall for ever shine with-

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out change or decay in one uninterrupted permanence of eternity.

When God first gave us an existence, it was that we might share with him in a happy eternity. For tho' the bodies, in which we live, are dissolved by death at their appointed time, yet our souls are immortal. At the last day we shall rise again, and from that moment we shall exist body and soul together for eternity. Eternity, relatively considered, is as comfortable in one point of view, as it is dreadful in another. To the patient sufferer of affliction the hope of endless happiness gives unspeakable comfort, but to an obstinate sinner the fear of endless punishment is most dreadful.

Whatever station Providence has assigned us in the world, we are but as guests and strangers in a foreign land, left to work our way towards our heavenly home. Whether we here meet with comforts or afflictions, whether we walk thro' the pleasant fields of prosperity, or tread the thorny paths of adversity, we must be careful not to be misled  
by

by the one, nor disheartened by the other. It is not by them, that we are to be made either happy or unhappy; they are no more than the transient incidents of human life; we shall exist, when they are no more. The world may seek to flatter us with its smiles, to amuse us with its vanities, or to draw us out of our way by its dangerous allurements: let us then reflect, that we are made for Heaven, and earthly delights will no longer engage the affection of our hearts. The world will cease to charm the moment we are convinced that it cannot make us happy. On a soul therefore, that keeps eternity in view, the fleeting vanities of life make no deep impression. She finds them too trifling to satisfy her expectations, too earthly to allay her thirst of happiness, too short and too imperfect to remove even her present wants.

Now if from the things that please, we turn our thoughts to the things that hurt us, we shall find, that the very reason, which damps the pleasures of the first, will soften the sting of the latter. For tho' we groan



out change or decay in one uninterrupted permanence of eternity.

When God first gave us an existence, it was that we might share with him in a happy eternity. For tho' the bodies, in which we live, are dissolved by death at their appointed time, yet our souls are immortal. At the last day we shall rise again, and from that moment we shall exist body and soul together for eternity. Eternity, relatively considered, is as comfortable in one point of view, as it is dreadful in another. To the patient sufferer of affliction the hope of endless happiness gives unspeakable comfort, but to an obstinate sinner the fear of endless punishment is most dreadful.

Whatever station Providence has assigned us in the world, we are but as guests and strangers in a foreign land, left to work our way towards our heavenly home. Whether we here meet with comforts or afflictions, whether we walk thro' the pleasant fields of prosperity, or tread the thorny paths of adversity, we must be careful not to be misled  
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by the one, nor disheartened by the other. It is not by them, that we are to be made either happy or unhappy; they are no more than the transient incidents of human life; we shall exist, when they are no more. The world may seek to flatter us with its smiles, to amuse us with its vanities, or to draw us out of our way by its dangerous allurements: let us then reflect, that we are made for Heaven, and earthly delights will no longer engage the affection of our hearts. The world will cease to charm the moment we are convinced that it cannot make us happy. On a soul therefore, that keeps eternity in view, the fleeting vanities of life make no deep impression. She finds them too trifling to satisfy her expectations, too earthly to allay her thirst of happiness, too short and too imperfect to remove even her present wants.

Now if from the things that please, we turn our thoughts to the things that hurt us, we shall find, that the very reason, which damps the pleasures of the first, will soften the sting of the latter. For tho' we groan

under a load of misfortunes, tho' we may be visited by sickness, and fed with the bread of affliction, yet in the midst of all our sufferings it will be a singular comfort to reflect, that they soon must end, and that we have an eternity to expect. We know by faith, that the light and momentary tribulation of the Just will be succeeded by immense joys, which shall never end. Wherefore let us be moderate in our affections; let faith and reason guide us in our schemes and pursuits: for there is nothing permanent under the sun: the world passes away with every object, that can delight or afflict us long. After a short interval of time we shall also pass away: an eternity will then succeed. An eternity of joy, or an eternity of pain, will be our certain lot: the first is the object of our present hope, the latter of our fears. The five following reflections will point out the fruit we are to reap from this consideration.

1st. When compared with the vast and unbounded view we have taken of the eternity of God, how confined, how short,  
and



and almost nothing is the life of man? A few days, or a few years at most, make up the whole of its duration: the day of our departure borders upon that of our birth: we exist to day, to morrow perchance we shall be no more. One sudden stroke, as it happens daily to many, may cut us off in the middle of our career, and rank us among the dead. Even the longest extent of human life, when it is once past, will appear as short as a single instant: and in effect, life is no more than a morning vapour, a fleeting shadow, or a passing cloud, which disperses in air almost as soon as it is formed: or to speak more properly, life is a continual death, which begins to destroy us the moment we begin to live. Yet short and perishable as this life is, how idly is it often spent? How often impaired or thrown away in sinful excesses, in toilsome pursuits and empty projects, as if a transient enjoyment of this world were the only end of our creation, or as if after death we had nothing more to fear or hope for? What are your sentiments, my Brethren, upon this important point, and what do you conclude?

2dly. As God is eternal in himself, so by an eternal decree he has ordained an eternity for man. But in this eternity, towards which man daily tends, there are two opposite states for his punishment or reward according to his works. There is an eternity of bliss prepared for the Elect; there is an eternity of pain reserved for the reprobate. The first abounds with every delight, that can make us happy; the latter is composed of every evil, that can make us miserable. Which do we pursue? To which of the two shall we belong? Shall we be exalted with the Elect in glory, or shall we be cast with the reprobate into endless misery? This is a secret wholly hidden. From the infinite mercy and goodness of God each one should hope for the best; but conscious of his weakness no man should think himself secure.

3dly. Eternity is at no great distance from us; we stand upon its brink, and nothing but the slender partition of life divides us from it. Man, born of a woman, is destined to live but a short time.\* The  
number

\* Job xiv.

number of his days is already counted, the precise hour of his passing out of time into eternity is irrevocably fixt. How soon, or when that hour will come, we know not; it may surprise us in an instant; it will come at the instant we least suspect: but come when it will, we most certainly know, that in that instant we shall be either called to endless joys, or doomed to endless pains, according to our deserts. From that instant will be dated our unchangeable lot for ever.

4thly. Under this uncertainty when our hour will come, and knowing that when it comes, eternal life or eternal death will immediately ensue, we cannot be too early nor too serious in preparing for the awful event. They, who are truly wise, make this their constant study; by them no day is lost. They consider time as a thing too precious, and life too short, to be thrown away upon what they must soon part with. They wisely think no precaution can be too great, while eternal happiness is pending. Eternal happiness once lost is never to be regained. Have we ever seriously considered this?



Have we prudently provided against the worst? Should a voice from Heaven this moment summon us away, what would be our thoughts? With what dispositions should we obey the call? Is our conscience free from guilt? Are we prepared to answer for ourselves at the tribunal of an eternal God, or have we done enough to secure judgment in our favour?

5thly. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord,\* for from thenceforth their labours will cease, and they shall rest in everlasting peace. Under this consideration eternity wears a cheering aspect. During our mortal pilgrimage on earth, we are in a state of exile; we must necessarily meet with many troubles and afflictions in our way. But in our patience we shall possess our souls.† We suffer nothing, but what we may make conducive to our future glory. Our heavenly Father always has his eye upon us; he sees what we undergo for his sake, and will reward us in due season. Wait but a little while and he will call us  
to

\* Rev. xiv. † Luke xxi.

to himself. Heaven is the place assigned for our permanent abode. The clouds of passing evils, which at times overshadow the sunshine of life, will be finally dispelled by the bright day of eternity. Though perishable and mortal by nature, we are by grace entitled to the privilege of sharing in that happy, that glorious immortality, which is the inheritance of Saints. To that let us constantly aspire; in view of that let us regulate our thoughts, our actions, and desires; in hopes of that let us solely live and prepare to die. For whether we live, or whether we die, we solely belong to God. A few years of life on earth are only granted, that we may qualify ourselves to live eternally in Heaven.

My Brethren, these reflections are solid, they are interesting, and they are salutary. To impress the sentiments they have awakened still more deeply in our hearts, let us consider the state of two souls in the act of quitting this world to enter upon eternity, the one a just soul, rising triumphant into heavenly glory; the other a

reprobate, falling headlong down into the burning lake. In the first place, then, let us conceive, if we can, the joyful transports of a soul escaping from this vale of tears, and invited by her heavenly Father to take possession of the kingdom, which his love has prepared for her from the beginning of the world. When soaring in her flight, she shall cast back an eye upon the earth, how will she congratulate with herself upon the dangers she has passed, upon the victories she has gained, and the trophies she has raised over sin and all her enemies? Death shall then be absorbed in her triumph; neither sickness, nor pain, nor sorrow shall afflict her more. But with what feeling will she look down on those, whom she has left behind, in the midst of dangers, of troubles, and vexations, which are inseparable from human life? With pity she will see their trifling pastimes, their empty projects, their worldly cares, and the turbulent desires, which cloud their understandings, and harden their hearts against the force of truth.

O perverse, O senseless world, will she  
exclaim,



exclaim, how great is thy insensibility, and how deplorable is the blindness of thy deluded followers, who please themselves with the emptiness of thy deceitful charms, and so pass their days unmindful of that immortal crown, which is prepared to reward their virtues! Eternal thanks be to thee, my God, for thus calling me from the place of exile into thy blissful presence! The expected, the long-wished for day is come, the happy moment is at hand which opens to me the mansions of the Blest, and unites me for ever with my God in his kingdom of glory. With sentiments like these the happy soul will enter into the joy of her Lord, there to live and reign with him thro' all eternity.

How different, alas! will be the disposition of a reprobate soul in the fatal moment, when death shall tear her from the body and all her former connexions. To her view eternity is instantly displayed, where she has nothing but endless misery to expect. With what terrour will she behold the frightful prospect? The world

and all its illusions will at once vanish, and the abandoned soul will see, what she would not see before, how deceitful the world is in its promises, how treacherous in its smiles, how false in its friendships. To her sorrow she will then discover the shortness of human life, and too late confess, how foolishly she squandered it away in unprofitable or sinful pursuits. With unavailing tears she will weep over her past follies, and condemn her obstinate, her stupid neglect of salvation. But what bitter anguish and despair will she feel at the sight of the bottomless abyss, of the burning lake of fire and brimstone, into which she is ready to be thrown, and from which there is no redemption? O, how earnestly will she wish for one of the many days she has idly lost, and how profitably would she employ the hour granted for repentance? But to that wretched soul the hour of repentance is elapsed, never to be had again. Her final lot is now decided, the last sentence is pronounced, her condemnation is without reprieve. Behold her plunged into the bottomless pit of everlasting fire,

fire, banished for ever from the light of heaven into utter darkness, loaded with the curse of her Creator and her own. O eternity, eternity ! Is it possible, my Brethren, that any perishable object should ever so far engross our thoughts, as to make us forget our last end, or that any earthly consideration should draw us from our Christian duty, whilst we reflect, that we have an eternity of woe to shun, and an eternity of happiness to gain ?

O great and eternal God, I adore thee with all the powers of my soul ; thou art the beginning, the measure, and the end of all, that is. From thee every living creature has received its life and being ; by thee all things have been made, and without thee there is nothing that is, or can be made. From thy throne of eternal glory thou lookest down upon the transitory existence of all human things ; thou beholdest from their beginning to their end the vast extent of ages, the quick succession of revolving years, that flow like the swift current of a river successively away, and lose themselves in the boundless ocean of thy eternity.

O God,



O God, how spacious are thy courts! How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! How exalted is the glory, and how incomprehensible are the joys of thy Elect! By the grace of adoption thou hast given us a title to them: by thy holy word, by the secret touches of our hearts, thou invitest us to thy heavenly kingdom. Shall we then be deaf to thy invitation, shall we forfeit our inheritance, shall we resign our title to everlasting happiness for an earthly toy, for a base passion, for a short delight? The mouth of the deep abyss is always open; thousands of unhappy souls daily fall a prey to devouring flames; there drenched with the wrath of God they shall eternally burn, they shall eternally weep, and gnash their teeth in despair. My God, how terrible art thou in thy chastisements! It matters but little, what our afflictions are in this short life, provided we escape the eternal rigours of the next. The present state, whether of comfort or affliction, will quickly pass away; eternity is the point we are to keep in view. The course of our mortal life is hastening to  
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an end. To us some day, not far distant, will be the last. To numbers of souls the present is the last; and in this very hour their sentence is pronounced, which assigns them to life or death everlasting. When that last hour shall appear, attended with the symptoms of an approaching dissolution, what will be our thoughts of what is past, of what once afflicted or delighted us in life? All will then vanish like a shadow, and leave us nothing but the grave.

O gracious Lord, dispel our present darkness by the light of thy holy grace, and stamp upon our souls a lively sense of thy eternity! By the favour of that supernal light, we shall be able to discern the emptiness of all earthly things, to disentangle our hearts from the love of creatures, and to settle our affections on that supreme, that eternal Good, which alone can make us happy. The thought of eternity will enlighten us in our doubts, it will encourage us in the hour of difficulties, it will strengthen us against temptations, and console us in affliction. At the prospect of a happy eternity we shall despise the vanities of a sinful world,

world, we shall be roused from our sloth, our charity will be kindled into action, and no human consideration will ever draw us from the fidelity, which we owe to thee.

O God eternal, the author of life, the immortal and invisible king of ages, be thou always honoured and glorified on earth by all thy creatures! May the heavenly quires of Saints and Angels proclaim thy praise thro' all eternity! O deign to admit us among their happy number! For we dare no otherwise presume than on thy infinite goodness. In thee, O Lord, we place our trust, in thee we hope. O let us not be confounded for ever! Sensible of our own sinful weakness, we adore thy power, we acknowledge thy tender mercies over us, and we thank thee with all our soul for granting us the time to prepare for life eternal. Too late have we known thee, O ancient Truth; too long have we neglected our only lasting good. To live eternally with thee in thy glory is the sublime end, for which thou hast made us. Thro' thy holy grace every moment of our lives shall from this time forward be devoted to that end.

DISCOURSE



## DISCOURSE III.

UPON THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

*I am the Lord, and I change not.*

Malachi c. iii. v. 6.

**A**Lmighty God in exprefs terms declares himfelf to be the unchangeable Lord of all things. God is therefore unchangeable in his nature, he is unchangeable in his will, he is unchangeable in his word and promifes. For in God, fays the Apoftle St. James,\* there is no change, nor even the fhadow of change.

God is unchangeable in his nature, becaufe being infinitely perfect he has no innate excellence either to lofe or acquire. Wherever any real change takes place, it is by fome alteration made in the fubject changed; that is to fay, the fubject muft either acquire fomething, which it had not before, or it muft lofe fomething of what it had. Now God can acquire nothing new;  
because

\* C. i.

because by his essence he is the plenitude of perfection, the plenitude of sanctity, the plenitude of mercy, the plenitude of wisdom, the plenitude of power; in a word, the plenitude of all good. God therefore cannot possibly acquire any sort of perfection, which he has not always possessed in a degree the most perfect. By the same parity of reason he cannot possibly part with any thing he is possessed of. His perfections flow from no other source than from himself, they are inherent in his very nature; and as they neither are, nor could ever be acquired by any regular progress or accession of parts, so they never can admit of any division or decrease. God always was, what he now is, and he can be no otherwise than he is. What he possesses, he possessed from eternity, nor will he ever possess any thing, which he does not now possess, in one and the same indivisible nature, because within himself he essentially contains all good without mixture, without change or measure.

Time, which measures the duration of earthly things, is changing every instant,  
and

and by its rapid tho' silent progress works an universal change in the face of nature. The morning sun rises to cheer us by the return of day, and after a few hours of passing sunshine leaves us again in the shades of night. By the constant succession of such days, we are imperceptibly carried on from infancy to manhood, from one period to another, till life finally wastes away, and death consigns these corruptible bodies to the grave. The swift revolution of seasons one upon another pushes on each fleeting year, and years proceed in one perpetual round, till the world itself shall at length decay with age, and a new earth and new heavens shall succeed.\* But amidst these wonderful changes of the visible creation, God in his glory shall for ever shine with undiminished light. Unalterable in his nature, as well as in the manner of his existence, he remains above the reach of time, his life receives no increase of age, his eternal duration always is the same, his reign is not measured by the date of years, nor is the splendour

\* 2 Peter, C. iii.



splendour of his greatness varied by any alternate change of day and night. In the beginning, O Lord, thou didst found the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands, says St. Paul to the Hebrews.\* They shall perish, but thou shalt remain: they shall grow old as a garment, and as clothing thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But thou thyself art the same, and thy years shall never fail.

God also is unchangeable in his will. Being directed by an infinite wisdom, by which he perfectly sees and knows all things, that can possibly exist in every circumstance of time and place, he can never have any reason to depart from what he has once decreed. His understanding can acquire no new light, and no additional knowledge. His goodness can propose to itself no motive to determine or to alter his resolution; his decrees therefore, equally with his essence, admit of no alteration, no change. God always wills what he has once decreed, nor can he ever decree any one thing, which  
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has not been decreed by him from all eternity. When we therefore meet with any phrase in Scripture, which according to the letter seems to indicate a succession of ideas in God, as where he is said\* to grieve in his heart, and to repent of his having created man, we cannot possibly understand it in a sense, that expresses a real contrariety of acts in the divine will. For here the inspired writer accommodates himself to our manner of speaking, and in mentioning the deluge, which a just God from eternity had resolved to inflict upon a sinful world, adopts a language, which is familiar to the sons of men. In this as well as in many other passages of holy writ, the expression is suited to our weak comprehension of divine things, says the holy doctor St. Ambrose, that we may thereby be made sensible of the heinousness of sin, which is chastised by such heavy vengeance. For the heinousness of sin committed against an infinite-majesty is so great, that God, unsusceptible by nature as he is of real anger, of grief, of repentance, of hatred,

\* Gen. vi.

hatred, or of any other passion, is said to be moved with indignation at it.

Nothing can happen in the nature of things, which by an all-knowing God is not foreseen. We therefore deceive ourselves, says St. Austin, if from the various changes that happen in the universe, we conclude there is a change in the divine will, which either produces or permits them. The will of God is immutable and invariable in itself; but the effects it produces are different according to the difference of good or evil it discovers in us. It shows either mercy to us in regard to our virtues, or severity in punishment of our crimes. The works of God therefore are frequently different, but his will is always the same; always invariable in its views, consistent in its designs, and unchangeable in its decrees. Great God, exclaims the same Saint Austin, thou burnest with love, and art not consumed; thou repentest and art not susceptible of grief; thou appearest to be angry and art always peaceful; that is to say, thou alterest thy works, thou alterest not thy counsel.



counsel. Thy will is unalterable, thou hast made a decree, and it shall not pass away.\* For the Lord is faithful in all his words.†

The heavens and the earth shall pass away, says our blessed Saviour,§ but my words shall never pass away. Therefore God is also unchangeable in his words and promises. God being the very essence of goodness and truth, it is not possible that he should either be deceived in himself, or that he should deceive us. There is nothing hidden from his sight; there is nothing but what he knows; what he therefore speaks must be true. Faithful are all his commandments, says the royal Prophet,† they are confirmed for ever and ever, they are founded in truth and equity. The testimony of God is therefore most certain, his declarations are sincere, his words are infallible, his promises are effectual. Whatever he foretels is most assuredly verified by the event, he never fails in the accomplishment of what he has once promised and announced. No, my brethren, God never retracts

\* Psalm cxlviii. † Psalm cxliv. § Mat. xxiv. † Psalm cxi.

retracts the word he has given, he never deceives, never baffles us in our expectation of the blessings he has promised. He never shuts his hand, nor refuses us his special graces, if we only dilate our hearts to receive them, and are generous in our endeavours to serve him. This it is, which forms the indissoluble tie, the sacred connexion, that subsists between God and man. This animates our confidence in the divine goodness, and fills our souls with a lively expectation of being eternally happy. For the word of God is the sure warrant of our faith, his promises are the foundation of our hope, and his goodness is the motive of our love.

What depends on man is every hour liable to change, as is man himself; but on the part of God all is fixt and permanent. From eternity he decreed to make man according to his own image and likeness, and he decreed to make him free. He has done so. Without infringing our liberty, his merciful design is, that all men should be saved,\* and come to the knowledge of his eternal truths.

For

\* Tim. ii.

For this purpose he has furnished us with the necessary helps of grace and nature, leaving it to our own choice to co-operate with him or not, by the free use of those powers which he has blest us with. He deters us from vice by the threats of everlasting punishments, and he invites us to virtue by the promise of everlasting rewards. If we therefore are deficient on our part, if we deviate from our duty and unfortunately lose our souls, to ourselves alone we must impute the loss. The benevolent will of God is not changed in our regard, he still continues true to his word, faithful in his promises, and inexhaustible in his goodness. By an eternal and immutable decree, he renders to each one according to his works. Both his justice and his mercy endure for evermore. The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but his word shall never pass away.

To these immutable perfections, which we behold in God, how opposite are the ways of men? How uncertain is man in his resolves, how unsettled in his schemes, how



unsteady in his friendships, how irresolute in his promises, how wavering even in his faith and religious principles? Changeable by nature, and restless in his disposition, he varies according to the various impressions he receives from the objects, that surround him, one while relinquishing what he had eagerly pursued, and then warmly embracing what he had quarrelled with before. This undoubtedly is a weakness extremely humbling to human pride, and yet upon reflection we shall find it to be a weakness inherent in our very nature. It springs from the ignorance of our understanding, from the fickleness of our temper, and from the contrariety of our passions. From this triple source we may trace the universal ebb and flow of human inconstancy.

1st. The capacity of man's mind is too narrow to comprehend many things at once, and its discernment too weak to discover at first sight all, that can be discovered even in the most trivial things.

The more we examine, the more we discover; upon a more serious consideration,

new

new motives, new circumstances, and new difficulties appear, which in the beginning were not so much as thought of. Upon our being better informed, we immediately perceive, that a change is necessary, and that to do well fresh measures must be taken, and some other system adopted. In such circumstances reason not only approves, but even dictates the change. For it is a false honour not to own the force of reason, and downright obstinacy to reject the light of conviction. Wilfully to persist, or not persist in a known error, is what distinguishes the bad man from the good. It is no disgrace to acknowledge the mistake we were in; it is honourable to desist, when we are evidently wrong.

2dly. Another source of human inconstancy arises from the fickle disposition of the heart. We are naturally pleased, and easily gained by the objects, that flatter our senses. Now as these objects incessantly vary under the different forms and colours, in which they meet the eye, so various likewise are the notions and affections, which

they excite in the heart. To-day we are charmed with one thing, to-morrow with another. This object pleases for a moment, and the moment after it is exchanged for something else. Even the same object, placed in different circumstances, and in different points of view, is as eagerly pursued at one time, as it is suddenly relinquished at another. Tired and disgusted with the toy, that glittered at a distance, we as readily give it up, as the child parts with its plaything for another equally insignificant. Thus by a multiplicity of deluding objects the heart of man is continually divided in its pursuits. Thus it is always roving and always changing from one thing to another, without settling upon any, because amongst all the goods of earth, it can meet with none, that are equal to its desires; none, that can content it long; none, that can make it happy. O God, thou has made us for thyself alone, and restless is our heart, says St. Austin, until it rests in thee.

3dly. The chief cause and most fertile  
source



source of the instability of man are his passions. Isaiah\* compares the heart of a worldly man to a raging sea, which cannot rest. The passions, that arise within him, are as so many restless waves, which, being once put into a ferment, distract and toss the troubled soul a thousand different ways, according to the different conflicts they excite within her. And as it is not possible, that the sea should continue calm, when jarring tempests burst upon its surface; so it is equally impossible for man to possess his soul in peace, when assaulted by the violence of unruly passions, which he fosters within his breast. At one time it is his vanity, at another it is his pride or intemperance, that torments him: now envy gnaws his heart with vexation, or anger prompts him to revenge; now the love of power, of pleasures, or of riches distracts his thoughts with a variety of anxious cares and uneasinesses. One while his ambition swells to the pitch of insolence, then disappointment throws him into a state of dejection

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jection

\* C. lvii.

jection, and sometimes all his passions break out with united force, and exercise by turns their cruel tyranny over him. He is consequently hurried in his projects thro' as many changes and vicissitudes, as there are different objects and incentives of his passions. Thus floating on the tide of endless fears and desires, the human heart is in continual agitation and trouble. For such is its misfortune, that it seldom thinks of enjoying the present, but is always pining after some distant good. And this is the deplorable condition, to which every Christian is exposed, as long as he lays not his irregular appetites under due restraint, or squares not his conduct by the steady principles of virtue and religion.

The world in general is governed by maxims peculiar to itself. The bulk of mankind make those maxims their rule of life, and therefore little else than inconstancy and change is to be seen amongst them. Hence the world is as changeable in its projects, and as faithless in its promises, as it is unsteady in its connexions and its friendships.

friendships. Friendship must have something more than a meer sympathy of tempers to make it lasting: it must be founded in principle, and nourished by confidence. To be true it must be equally steady, whether fortune frown or smile upon it; and such a friendship the world but seldom knows. Upon the motives of interest or convenience we see societies no sooner formed than broken. For since they have no other than some temporary consideration to hold them together, the moment that fails, they dissolve away into as many separate parties as they have separate interests to pursue.

Such is the inconstancy of the world in its boasted friendships. Are its words and promises more to be relied upon? The world promises a peace, which it cannot give; makes offers of service, which it never performs; enters into engagements, which it often breaks. Nothing is so common with the world as repeated protestations of friendship, great professions of esteem, flattering smiles and caresses, kind and complai-



fant expressions without end. These please, and put us in good humour at the time, but the event too often shows, that nothing more was meant than a passing ceremony. Compliments may flow like milk and honey from the lips, but unless they speak the language of the heart, they are no better than a set of unmeaning words, written in the loosest sand; the first wind that blows effaces every character.

The schemes and projects of the world pass in the same unsettled manner. Great undertakings are set on foot, and then abandoned; various resolutions formed, and then forgotten; many things begun, and never finished. Hence the world is, as it were, one great moving scene of inconsistency, a passing figure of divers forms and colours, that vary every instant. From a world so false, so fickle, and deceitful, we have no lasting good to hope for. Tho' we labour in its service, it seldom furnishes enough to requite our pains; it can never give enough to satisfy our desires. Let us then turn our thoughts on God, who alone can fix our  
 hearts

hearts, and bestow a reward equal to our wishes. There let us rest. For being once engaged in the divine service, we can have no solid reason to change our course. The motives, which first induced us to give our hearts to God, will for ever retain their full force. God is now the same he always was, infinitely great and good, infinitely amiable and beautiful in all perfection. His goodness towards us is not lessened. As he created, so he still preserves us by his power, with the same bounteous hand he relieves us in our wants, he encourages us by the same promises, he holds the same crown over our heads to reward us for all we do or suffer for his sake. By the same title of gratitude we are therefore bound to love him with affection, and to serve him with fidelity to the very end, as long as life shall last.

Notwithstanding this, how much inconstancy have we been witnesses of, and what changes have we seen? Behold a prodigal youth, who had left his heavenly Father's house, now returning from his evil

ways. He had been struck at the danger he was in of being eternally lost, he was softened with compunction for his sins, he humbly confessed his guilt, and earnestly sued for pardon from his offended God. Being received into favour again, with gratitude he acknowledged his Creator's goodness, he began to serve him with fresh fervour, he was fed with the milk of consolation, and enjoyed a serenity of mind, which in the midst of his earthly pursuits he had never felt. How came he then to turn from the Lord his God, and to relapse into his former sins ?

By the ministry of his holy word, by the advice of friends, by secret inspirations and remorse of conscience, God is pleased to call the sinner to repentance. You, dear Christian, may perchance have heard his voice sweetly calling upon you. You listened to it, and was roused to a sense of your duty. The day of grace began to dawn upon your soul, you generously took the resolution, and even fixed the time of reconciling yourself to God. But drawn away by the force of habit, or  
of bad



of bad example, how quickly did you change your mind? In the hurry of your worldly pursuits and engagements you either forgot or resolved to defer the time of your repentance; you then began to think there was no need of any immediate reform, you kicked against the stings of conscience, and in the end concluded not to break the chain of your amusements. In vain did God still knock and call for admittance into your heart. His voice was either not heard or not attended to. For on a soul, that is hardened by neglect, the word of God makes no sensible impression. God is then provoked at so obstinate a resistance; he no longer calls, but retires in dreadful silence; he finally withdraws his slighted graces, to bestow them where they will be more gratefully received.

Some Christians there are, who by a happy turn of mind seem to be born for virtuous actions, and these also have their changes and their starts of inconstancy. Having felt the influence of divine grace, they began to serve God with their whole heart;

they promised eternal fidelity to him, and made it their study to do his will in all things. But no sooner did temptations rise, or some unexpected difficulty occur, than their virtue was at a stand, their resolutions were shaken, and the fair fabrick they were raising seemed to be upon the point of being overturned.

Can we without tears behold those unhappy men, who by a change of principle and manners are become enemies of the cross of Christ, as St. Paul speaks to the Philippians? \* By the care of good and virtuous parents they had been principled betimes in their duty towards God and man; they had been distinctly taught what they were to believe, and what to practise for salvation; by their docility and behaviour they gave hopes of being one day the ornament of their family, as well as of the religion they professed. But how soon, alas, did the prospect change? Scarce were they acquainted with the world, but they became familiar with its vices. The good principles

\* C. iii.

principles, which they had imbibed at first, were soon forgot and those of libertinism, irreligion, and impiety have been adopted in their stead. Is the gospel then no longer to be believed, or have its precepts ceased to be in force? Has God altered his holy law in favour of a corrupt world, or can the world justify a breach of the sacred promises we have made to God? The world may establish new customs, new laws, and systems for the regulation of civil life; it may establish even vice by maxim, and make it current by example; but it can never change the nature, nor invalidate the force of our Christian obligations. What our great God has once enacted, either for our belief or our practice, is not to be reversed by any human authority whatever. Human inventions and fashions vary by caprice at different times and in different nations; but the word of God never varies. Faith is but one,\* it changes not by age or climate. The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but of the law of God, my Brethren,

\* Eph. iv.



ren, not so much as a single point, or the least tittle shall ever be blotted out. \*

In the portrait we have drawn of a changeable world, you may perchance have observed some distinguishable features of your own. For how often with the world have you faltered in your principle, how often have you varied in your choice between good and evil? What irresolution in your conduct, what unsteadiness and infidelity in the divine service have you not betrayed? You once were fixt in the choice you had made of a virtuous life, you ran the ways of God's commandments without reproof, you dilated your hearts, and God replenished them with the unction of his holy Spirit. How came you then to relent, and why did you turn your back upon him. Was he not still your Maker, your Redeemer, your Father, your Benefactor, and your Comforter in affliction? Is he not the same he always was? Has he ever ceased to encourage, to caress and strengthen you in all your trials? Is he altered in his affection

\* Mat. v.

affection or in his tender goodness towards you? Does he not possess, does he not show the same kindness, the same mercy, the same liberality, the same benevolent dispositions, to make you eternally happy? O my Brethren, what has since seduced you from the path you walked in? Your days were then serene; they were the most cheerful days, because the most virtuous of your life. In creatures, is there any thing more charming, more desirable or lasting, than what you find in God? Why have you therefore changed, why are you become ungrateful and perfidious against your kind, your friendly Benefactor, your Father, and your God? But what are the fruits you have reaped from the unhappy change? Consult your hearts, and they will tell you nothing but remorse, uneasiness, and affliction of mind.

O that you had steadily pursued your once virtuous course! How precious in the sight of God would you now be, and what meritorious treasures would you now possess? A charming peace, which the world has not  
to give,

to give, would now sooth your souls, and a holy confidence in the divine bounty would dispel the fears of death. This is a comfort I know you sigh after. Sentiments of regret for having fallen from your duty, and an ardent desire to repair your loss undoubtedly warm your breasts. These sentiments are the language of the Holy Ghost speaking to your hearts; they are the effects of his working grace, and a mark of his tender mercy, inviting you back to receive the favours you once enjoyed. In this, O Lord, we acknowledge thy goodness, and adore thy love.

To serve thee with new zeal is indeed the present purpose of our hearts, but to persevere in that purpose must be thy gracious gift. Conscious of our own weakness, we know that without thy aid our best endeavours will be fruitless. Unsteady as the reed which bends to every wind, we stand in continual want of thy strengthening grace to fix our resolution. We live in the midst of a perilous world, where we meet with as many occasions to draw us from our duty,  
as there



as there are temptations to seduce us into sin. Cast then, O God, an eye of compassion on us, succour our distress, and as our hope is all in thee, so be thou our help and our salvation.

Having thus considered the world's mutability and our own, in opposition to the unchangeable perfections of God, we ought, as children of our heavenly Father, to excite in ourselves a sincere desire of copying after the divine original, by a steady perseverance in our Christian duties. For this purpose let us take the following resolutions.

1st. To repent of all past infidelities, and to guard against a relapse.

2dly. To mistrust our own lights, and to undertake nothing of moment without mature deliberation and advice.

3dly. To engage in no business of importance, tho' ever so laudable, when the mind is either blinded by indiscreet zeal, or disturbed by passion. In the moment of hurry, things oftentimes appear through a deceitful medium, and what may then seem eligible,

eligible, will perchance upon cool reflection be judged improper.

4thly. To enter upon no new obligations, which either interfere with the common duties of life, or are hard to be complied with. Easy tasks in the beginning pave the way to more arduous undertakings: it is no less rash to undertake what you are unable to perform, than disgraceful to desist from what you have prudently begun.

5thly. To seek from God success in your undertakings, by the means of prayer and other works of piety, as reason and religion teach us. For without God\* we can do nothing.

\* John xv.

## DISCOURSE IV.

UPON THE IMMENSITY OF GOD.

*Thou alone art the most High.* Ps. lxxxii.

**I**mmensity is an absolute quality, which excludes all comparison of greater or less from the idea we have of it. Immensity therefore in its full meaning is only applicable to that, than which there is nothing greater. For as that alone is properly said to be eternal, which exceeds every date of time, so that alone is said to be immense, which surpasses all measure of extension. A pure creature, such as an Angel is, may be denominated great within its own sphere of limited perfection; it may be great in knowledge, in sanctity and power, even beyond the reach of our understanding: but being finite by the very nature of its existence, it never can in the strict use of language be stiled immense. For to be immense is to be nothing less than infinite.

Immensity therefore is a perfection, which  
solely



solely belongs to God. By this, God is unbounded in the manner of his existence : by this, he is actually diffused through every part of the visible and invisible creation. God is in all and in every one of his creatures at the same time ; he is in all places, even the most discontiguous, without being separated by distance, or confined by space. Hence he reaches infinitely beyond all, that is created, not by any local extension of parts, for parts in a pure spirit there can be none, but by the universal presence of his divinity, which is indivisible and immense.

Such is the idea, which reason teaches us to form of the immensity of God, and in this the dictates of reason are perfectly consonant with the word of God himself, whose style is truly noble and sublime on this subject. Am I, think ye, a God only at hand, and not a God afar off, says the Lord? Shall a man hide himself in a place the most secret, and I not see him? Do I not fill the heaven and the earth, says the Lord.? \* O Israel, how great is the house of the

\* Jer. xxiii.

of the Lord, and how vast is the extent of his place of residence, says the Prophet Baruch? \* It is great and has no end: it is high, it is immeasurable. The whole circumference of heaven is not large enough to contain him. Wherefore, what wilt thou do, cries holy Job, † and whither canst thou go not to be seen by God? For God by virtue of his unbounded immensity reaches above the height of the heavens, and beyond the length of the earth; he reaches beyond the width of the ocean, and even below the bottomless depth of the infernal pit. Yes, there is not the smallest spot upon the globe we inhabit, which he does not occupy by his presence, and there is no void ever so extensive, which he does not fill. He is intimately present in every individual part and corner of the universe: he is above the earth, because he is seated above the summit of its highest mountains; he is round the earth, because he encompasses it on every side; he is underneath the earth, because he supports it from its  
very

\* C. iii. † C. xi.

very foundations ; he is in fine within the earth, because he cements and holds it together in all its parts. He therefore comprises all, and is comprised by none ; he embraces all, he contains all, and nothing can contain him ; for infinite greatness admits no bounds. Being in all places he has every thing near, nothing distant from him. The most lonesome deserts, the deepest caverns, and the most hidden recesses of the earth are always under his immediate view : with a single span he comprehends the wide circumference of this habitable globe, which in comparison of his divine immensity, is infinitely less than the smallest atom is with respect to the whole earth.

From the earth let us lift up our eyes and survey the spacious heavens with all their shining host. Behold the firmament extended far and wide, without the appearance of any bounds to confine it. Behold the planets, the sun, moon, and stars, richly scattered by the hand of God through the vast expanse, like so many distant worlds, some seemingly fixed in their exalted stations, and others with incredible velocity rolling round the  
common



common centre in their respective orbits. The bright magnificence they display, and the circles they describe in their annual revolutions, carry our imagination far beyond the uttermost expansion of the heavens, that our eye can reach to. The idea they convey is noble and sublime. But sublime and noble as the idea is, it presents us with nothing, that bears the least proportion with the greatness of God; nothing, but what is ruled and limited by the power of God; nothing, but what exists and moves within the sphere of the immensity of God.

Nor are we to rest here. For beyond the limits of this inferiour world, and above the sphere of these visible heavens, the light of revelation discovers to us other heavens, and another world still more glorious, and still more perfect, yet all within the bosom of the same divine immensity: a world not created for the use of man in his state of pilgrimage and trial, but reserved for his enjoyment in a life of endless felicity. There God reigns in the kingdom of his glory, and that is the kingdom, which in his infinite

finite wisdom he has prepared from the beginning, for the reward of his Elect. That kingdom is therefore such, as became a God of infinite power to prepare for the most excellent and the most deserving of his creatures : it is such, as no mortal eye can see, and no heart of man has yet conceived.

Behold here the utmost extent of all created greatness ; an extent, which no mortal power can presume to scan, and which heavenly spirits alone can fully comprehend. But the more we consider this vast extent of the glory and of the majesty of God, as it is manifested to us in the formation of the heavens and the earth, the more we see, how impossible it is to form an adequate idea of the immensity of God. For the immensity of God comprises not only the infinite distance there is between the Creator and his creatures, but also the infinite perfections he possesses within himself. God is immense in all his attributes : he is immense in wisdom, in goodness, in power, and in every other divine property. Because being a God infinitely perfect, he  
possesses

possesses every quality of the divine nature with unlimited perfection. Hence whether we consider what God has absolutely done in the creation of all things visible and invisible, or what in another providence he might have done, we shall discover nothing but what falls infinitely short of divine perfection. He might, if in his wisdom he had so decreed, have introduced into the creation another order of things every way more wonderful and more perfect than what we see in the present system. This assertion is founded on the certain knowledge we have of his inexhaustible omnipotence. He therefore might have created a variety of other worlds, increasing every instant in magnitude and beauty one above another to the end of time. By such an increase of created objects, his immensity would have undergone no diminution, no change; it would have felt no encroachment upon its boundless empire; it would have remained still unequalled, still supereminent and inviolable. For as his goodness can never be exhausted by the graces he bestows, so neither can his

D greatness

greatness be lessened by the wonders he performs, nor his immensity be confined by the creatures he gives existence to.

Strongly impressed with the idea of this immensity of God, the Royal Prophet speaks of it in terms the most expressive and pathetic, as if he felt himself enclosed, as it were, and environed by the divine presence on every side. Wonderful, O Lord, is thy knowledge to me, says he,\* it is great, and I cannot reach unto it. Whither then shall I fly to be out of thy sight, or whither can I go to lie concealed from thy all-piercing eye? If I ascend in thought to Heaven, thou art there upon thy throne of glory; or if I descend to hell, thou art present there, heaping dreadful punishments upon thine enemies. Should I take wing with the rising morn, and direct my flight to the extremities of the sea, thy presence would accompany me even thither, and thy right hand would still hold me. Wicked then would be the thought and vain the attempt to fly from the face of God. For neither  
land,

\* Psalm cxxxviii.



land, nor sea, nor heaven, nor hell itself has any retreat for man, where he can lurk unseen, and remain hidden from that divine eye, to which even the thickest darkness is not dark, and night itself is as light as day.†

To enforce this truth of the divine immensity, St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians § to ground themselves in the knowledge of it, that as far as human capacity, aided by faith, can attain to, they might be enabled to comprehend what is the breadth, the length, the height, and depth thereof. The Apostle here adapts his expression to our usual mode of speaking, and makes use of such terms as seem best suited to give us an idea of something greater than we can comprehend. For by this he informs us, that there is no place on earth so remote, and no extent of sea so wide, that in the highest heavens there is no point so high, and in the bottomless abyss no depth so low, which the Almighty does not reach to and infinitely beyond. Some interpreters indeed expound this text of the Apostle in a moral

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sense,

† Ibid. § C. iii.

sense, as if he meant by the length he speaks of, to express the longanimity of God in waiting for sinners after their call to repentance; by the breadth to specify the immense charity of God in extending his blessings to all men and nations, even to the remotest bounds of the earth; by the height to extol the magnificence of God, in bestowing such ample rewards as he does upon his Elect in heaven; by the depth in fine to mark the dreadful justice of God in heaping everlasting punishments upon the reprobate below. But whether we explain the Apostle's words in this meaning or in that, the idea they convey of the divine immensity is equally sublime.

Speculative as this consideration of the immensity of God may seem at first sight, yet upon examination, nothing will appear more practical in fact, on account of the strong influence it has upon human actions. That God is immense is a truth we cannot doubt of. To be immense is inseparable from the very nature of his divinity. That God is every where present is likewise a truth

truth we cannot question. This truth we should always bear in mind, since it is no less interesting to us, than certain in itself. For while we reflect, that we are under the immediate inspection of God, the sovereign Lord and judge of all our actions, how is it possible to be deficient in the service, or unfaithful in the duty we owe him? To walk in the divine presence, and to keep God constantly in view, is the direct way to Christian perfection: it is the way; which the Saints both of the old and new testament invariably pursued. Knowing that the Lord their God had his eye day and night fixed upon them, they inflexibly withstood every temptation, and broke thro' every obstacle, that opposed their progress. Full of that salutary hope, which lay within their breasts, they cheerfully ran the course of virtue, as tho' they had seen the hand of God holding out a crown of glory for the reward of their labours.

Heaven indeed is the place, which God has chosen for his seat of glory. There the brightness of his divinity shines revealed,

there the blessed Saints properly behold and enjoy him face to face. Thither we are taught, in expectation of the same happiness, to direct our thoughts, thither we raise our hearts, as often as we compose ourselves to pray, and from thence we hope to receive every good and every perfect gift, which descends from the Father of lights. But to enjoy the presence of God in the manner, that is suited to our mortal state, it is not necessary to ascend in spirit into heaven, as if he resided no where else. To converse with him, to warm our affections for him, to communicate our sentiments to him, and to unite our hearts intimately with him, we have but to rouse our faith, and we shall find him always by us, always with us, and always in us. For he is not at any distance from each one of us, says St. Paul,\* in him we live, in him we move, and in him we have our very being.

A fish swimming in the sea is not so thoroughly encompassed by the watery deep, as we are by the divine immensity : for the sea has its bounds, immensity has none. Which

\* Acts xviii.



every way we move, and to whatever point we direct our steps, it is still within the ocean of that boundless immensity of God, which surrounds and invests us on every side. God by his essence is not only diffused around us in the light we see, and in the air we breathe, he is moreover infused into our very souls within us: he penetrates our whole substance, he infolds and carries us in his bosom: so that we cannot move a hand or foot, which he is not witness of, nor form a passing thought, which he does not see, nor speak so much as a single word, which he does not hear. The immensity of God therefore constitutes the most intimate, and the most perfect connexion, that can possibly exist between the Creator and his creatures.

God is always with us by his power, because by his power he once made and still preserves us. God is every where by his wisdom, because by his wisdom he knows and sees all things in every circumstance of time and place. By his providence God is in every part of the creation, because by his providence he governs the whole, and di-

rects every individual portion thereof. But for this the reality of his immediate presence is not absolutely necessary. For tho' he resided at a distance from the earth, and were actually present in no other place but Heaven, he might nevertheless distinctly see from thence, whatever passes here below amongst his creatures, and by the means of his ministering Spirits he might with equal certainty direct and move, preserve and govern the whole system of the universe. In that supposition his divine influence might have been as powerful over all his creatures, but it would have operated at a distance from them : whereas his immensity renders him actually present with us, not merely by his inspirations and graces, or by any other operation of his fatherly providence over us, but by his personal essence and very Being. How comfortable to a Christian in affliction is the thought, that God the rewarder of virtue is always present with him!

In the immensity of God the whole universe subsists, as in a boundless ocean. Now if we cast our eyes upon this lower world,  
which

which we inhabit, and compare it not with the supreme and most high God, but only with those created luminaries, which shine so numerous and so bright above us, how inconsiderable, how little does this world appear? How little in its dimensions, how little in its projects, how little in its rewards and boasted promises? Yet little as it is, this world has the art of imposing upon our reason, and of engaging millions in its service by holding out something to them, which has the appearance of being great. A man of fortune, for instance, wishes to increase his landed property: he meets with an advantageous offer, he succeeds, and fancies he has made a great acquisition. What is it? Nothing more than a little spot of ground added to the little he was in possession of before. A seaman goes in search of undiscovered lands, he braves the storms and perils of the ocean, and fetches at last the circumference of the globe: he comes home justly applauded and admired for the exploit he has performed. What is it? Why he has sailed round this little ball

of earth, which, with respect to God, is no more than a floating atom in the boundless width of his immensity. A king by the valour of his troops acquires an addition of territory to his former possessions; he prides himself upon the fortunate event, and glories in his mighty conquest, the conquest of a few feet more of scanty empire, with some passing acclamations of applause, which flatter for a day, and then perish with the sound thereof. Warlike heroes of antiquity have been dignified with the name of Great for the empires they founded, and for the actions they performed. But how is their glory fallen, and how is their memory almost forgotten? They are sunk like their fellow mortals into dust; circumscribed and narrow were the limits both of their life and empire. So transient is the sunshine of worldly glory!

But such is the illusion, and such in general is the turn of worldly men, that whatever strikes or flatters their ambition, they fancy it to be something great. That a Christian, who has faith and reason for his guide,



guide, should be so far deluded, as to make himself a slave to the creatures, which were designed for his rational use and benefit; that a Christian, who is born for heaven, should so far forget himself, as to seek no other than a transient happiness in earthly objects, is a subject of equal pity and surprise. Thro' the weakness of corrupt nature our ideas of happiness are already too contracted, and we contract them still more by placing our affections upon creatures too little to content us, and too imperfect to satisfy even our present wants. The soul of man is too exalted in her views to be satisfied with any thing less than God. Notwithstanding the clog of mortal clay, which for the present confines her to the earth, she aspires to a greatness infinitely above all earthly greatness; she aspires to heaven. She has an inbred tendency to God, her Creator, who alone is capable of conferring a happiness equal to her desires.

Let us then dilate our hearts, and soaring in sentiment above the views of a narrow-minded world, let us act and think in all

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things

things as becomes Christians predestined to a state of immortality. For by adoption we are the sons of God, and by his grace we are heirs to the kingdom of heaven. A lively faith in the divine presence will confirm us in these Christian sentiments, it will restrain all inordinate desires, it will teach us to make use of the world as tho' we saw God in all his creatures. For by the immensity of his divine essence, God reaches from end to end, and thro' every individual part of the creation. We therefore know him to be actually present in every place we go to. We know that he is in all his creatures, and that all his creatures are in him. By him all things are preserved and animated, and in him they all exist. Hence he has not only ordained the different parts of the creation for our service, but he also imparts to them the immediate powers, by which they serve us. It is he, it is God himself, who enlightens us by the light we see, who refreshes us by the air we breathe, who nourishes us by the food we take, who supports us by the earth we stand upon.

Hence

Hence in the second place we know, and a pleasing comfort it is to know, that God is actually within us, within our heart; within our mind, within our very substance and in every power and faculty of our soul and body. Immense and infinite as he is, God himself whole and entire is always with us, and always in us. From ourselves we inherit no good, but in God we possess the plenitude of goodness, of power, and wisdom, ready to expand and communicate its influence to us according to the measure of our wants and desires. For in God we are as in an ever-flowing fountain, as in a delightful refuge, as in a place of safety, as in the source of light; or to say better, we are as darling children in the bosom of a most tender parent. There we repose, there we rest; there we forget our griefs, and there we console ourselves under the evils of the present life.

Hence, in the third place, it is a subject of singular comfort to reflect, that God not only knows, but that by his presence he is actually witness to all we do, and to all we suffer.

suffer. However great or painful may be the pressure of affliction, where is the Christian, who does not feel himself relieved, the moment he considers, that God is there ready to support, to succour, and to strengthen him in his sufferings? That he is present with him not only as the witness, but as the rewarder of all he patiently endures? I am with him in his tribulation, says he, by the mouth of the Psalmist.\* Let him wait but a little while, and I will deliver him, I will exalt him to glory, I will crown him with a length of days, and will show him my salvation.

Hence, in the fourth place, we shall be animated to a faithful diligence in the divine service, whether it be to decline from evil, or to do good. For if the presence of a fellow Christian, whom we respect and fear, is oftentimes enough to prevent our transgressing the bounds of our duty, how much more efficacious will be the presence of a God, who is at once to be the judge and punisher of our crime? Sinner, says Saint Austin,

\* Psalm xc.



Austin, before thou sin, find out a place if thou canst, where God shall not see thee. What? insult the Almighty to his face, make him witness of his own dishonour, and defy him in his very presence? Dost thou not behold his arm already lifted up, and darest thou provoke the blow, which upon the spot would strike thee down to the bottomless abyfs.

The generous Christian, on the other hand, is equally animated by the same divine presence, to discharge every part of his duty with all the attention he is capable of. If he meets with difficulties in his way, as in the way of virtue difficulties will be always found, far from being dismayed he embraces them as the means of proving his fidelity, and of testifying his love. A soldier under his Prince's eye is equally alert upon the march, as he is steady in the field of battle. Awed by respect, he utters no complaint against the service he is upon, he repines at no hardship, he shrinks from no duty, and disobeys no command. So it is with the Christian in his spiritual warfare, where he  
likewise

likewise has his labours to undergo, his difficulties, and struggles to surmount. He remembers, that God is there the witness of his conduct, and that if there are battles to be fought, there are also victories to be won.

Thanks, great God, and praise be to thee from all thy creatures, since thou hast thus rendered the knowledge of thy divine immensity not less useful to us, than it is glorious to thyself. Since, within the infinity of thy Being thou comprisest all things visible and invisible, and fillest the Universe with the plenitude of thy essence; since beyond the utmost bounds of the heavens, and within the inmost recesses of the earth and sea, thou residest with all thy power, with all thy majesty, and with all thy glory, can there be room for man to boast of any thing he has, as if it were his own? Where but in his own nothingness can the seat of vanity exist? Where but in his own weakness will he find a lurking place for pride? If thou dwellest in every imperceptible atom without being restrained in thy greatness; if  
 thou

thou art present in the most distant places without being divided in thy essence; if thou penetratest into the thickest darkness without diminishing one single beam of thy divine light; if thou descendest into the deepest dungeons without degrading thy majesty; and, what is still more wonderful, if thou art even in the breasts of sinners without staining thy sanctity, or lessening the splendour of thy glory; how adorable doest thou appear, and with what profound humility ought we to remember and respect thy presence?

Quicken then, O Lord, our faith, that we may respect and see thee in all creatures. By the aid of thy holy grace we will be as circumspect in our conduct to please thee, and as guarded in our words and actions not to offend thee, as though we saw thee present before our eyes: and since our most hidden thoughts, since every secret motion and affection of our hearts are ever naked to thy view, these also will we strictly watch, lest through the subtle windings of our passions, sin may steal in, and sully the purity of our souls.

DISCOURSE

## DISCOURSE V.

UPON THE SANCTITY OF GOD.

*There is none so holy as the Lord is.* 1 Kings,  
c. ii, v. 2.

**G**OD is holy, and of his holiness there is no bound. God is holy in himself, says the royal Prophet,\* he is holy in his name, § he is holy in all his works. ‡ The Scripture moreover tells us, that he is even magnificent † in holiness. The holiness of his essence therefore infinitely surpasses all other holiness. Properly speaking, he is the holy One, and the only One by excellence, who can challenge to himself the name of Holy. But when we say that God is holy, and holy even by excellence above all other things that are, our expression falls far short of the idea we wish to convey; we must also add, that He is holiness itself.

Holiness is a necessary perfection of the Divinity. It is inseparable from the notion we have of an all-perfect Being; it constitutes

\* Psalm xcvi. § Psalm cx. † Psalm clxiv. ‡ Exod. xv.



tutes his very essence. From hence as from the living and inexhaustible spring of perfection is derived every degree of sanctity that exists in heaven and on earth. How great, how glorious are the prerogatives, that accompany the holiness of Saints and Angels? Yet they are but as so many slender streams, that flow from the boundless ocean of the Divinity, or as so many feeble rays, which issue from the sun of justice. For holiness is of too refined and of too sublime a nature to spring from any other source than from God himself.

As God by the sanctity of his essence is the fountain, so he is also the pattern of all perfect holiness. In the heavenly spirits we behold the living images of a most transcendent sanctity; but with all its transcendency it is still a limited and a created sanctity. In the Saints we behold innumerable examples of most wonderful holiness, which they have traced out to us in their pure and spotless lives. But these examples of the Saints, wonderful as they are, have their limits, they are tinged with defects of human nature,

nature, and partake of the imperfections of frail mortality. In God alone is found that unlimited, that full and perfect holiness, which is, which always was, and always will be without spot, without blemish, without the smallest shadow of diminution or change.

The holiness of God being thus equally unlimited and unchangeable in his very nature, God is the strong support of all sanctity on earth. The sanctity, which reigns among the blessed in heaven, is constant, firm, and undisturbed in its repose. But the sanctity, which animates the souls of men on earth, is still in a state of trial, and liable to be overthrown. Unstable as the reed, which shakes with every breeze, it wavers to and fro, as the storm of passions assault the soul. Exposed as we are to the continual danger of being seduced in the midst of a perverse world, where we meet with as many obstacles to deter us from virtue, as there are incentives to allure us into vice, we stand always in need of some strong support to determine and fix our resolution

resolution in what is good. This support we receive from the immutable sanctity, from the all-supporting grace of God.

The holiness of God is not only our strength and support in virtue, by infusing his efficacious graces into our souls, it moreover is the reward and crown of our virtues. God himself assures us of it. Fear not, says he,\* I will be your protector, and your reward exceeding great. Riches, titles, dignities and honours are the great and utmost recompence of human services. The world has nothing greater to bestow. But when God prepares a recompence for labours undergone, and for actions performed in his service, no earthly crowns nor sceptres are proposed, no worldly wealth, no transitory titles or honours are so much as mentioned. Those things may indeed attract the notice of human vanity and ambition, but they are too insignificant to make any part of that immense, of that eternal reward, which a God of infinite sanctity bestows upon his Saints in heaven: for he bestows himself.

\* Gen. xv.

himself. They shall be his people, § and God himself with them shall be their God. † The Lord God shall enlighten them; they shall see his face, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The Saints, in their way to heaven, had, like us, many difficulties to struggle with. They had many sacrifices to make; they had the allurements of corrupt nature to resist; they had passions to subdue; they had foreign and domestic enemies to conquer. They were not daunted, they persisted in their glorious undertaking, faithful to the end. Therefore God himself, who is the plenitude of happiness, is their great, their everlasting reward. It is what we humbly hope for.

Faithful Christians, who sojourn in this vale of tears, you must expect to meet with contradictions and sufferings, while the time of your mortal pilgrimage continues. It is a time of trial and probation. By sufferings God is pleased to try and purify the virtues of his Elect. You are upon  
your

§ Rev. xxi.

† Rev. xxii.



your way to heaven; you perhaps find it rough and beset with thorns. Weak nature upon occasions may be tempted to repine at hardships, to which the duties of your state expose you. It may labour under the weight of affliction, it may sometimes fret at the pain it feels from the sting of persecution or oppression. But, my Brethren, lose not patience; lift up your heads,\* behold the day of your release approaches. Console yourselves with the pleasing thought of a happy Hereafter: a few months, or at most a few years of struggle more, and endless comfort is your own.

Lift up your eyes and hearts to heaven, the God of sanctity there presents himself to you. He is preparing for you a crown of immortality, he holds it even now over your heads for the encouragement of your hope. A God of infinite sanctity has furnished you with the means of sanctifying your souls, and if you only employ those means, the same God awaits you at the close  
of life

\* Luke xxi.

of life to crown your virtues with never-ending glory in the bosom of his divinity.

Let us enter a little more diffusely upon this sublime subject, which is so worthy of our most attentive consideration. Let us dive into the property of the holiness of God, and we shall find two leading characters, which distinguish it from his other attributes, an infinite love of moral good on one hand, and an insuperable hatred of moral evil on the other.

His infinite love of good inspires him with such affection for a just soul, that he declares it § to be his delight to dwell with the children of men. For in our souls, as long as they are not defiled with sin, he actually dwells as in a consecrated temple, sanctifying and adorning them with his most precious graces. Purity of manners, innocence of life, and cleanness of heart have such charms in his divine eye, that he has inspired his holy writer to search thro' the most exquisite beauties of nature for expressions to convey to us the love he has for  
virtue.

virtue. My beloved, the daughter of Jerusalem,\* says he, speaking of a just soul, is the most beautiful among women, she floweth with delights, she is all fair, and there is no blemish in her: she is as the rising morn, comely as the moon, and chosen as the sun.

Hence of all the titles given to God by the inspired writers, we meet with none so frequently, as that of Holy; and on that account it may be deemed his chosen characteristic, as peculiarly expressive of his divine excellence. It is the title, as St. John declares in his revelations, § which the heavenly Quires incessantly repeat, as if in that one attribute alone the whole perfection of the Divinity were eminently comprised. The holy Prophet Isaiah tells us, † that in a vision he saw the Lord of glory sitting upon an elevated throne, with a troop of melodious Seraphims standing round, and proclaiming with one universal voice of celestial harmony, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of hosts. God is

E infinitely

\* Cant. vi.

§ C. iv.

† C. vi.

infinitely great, he is omnipotent, he is eternal, immutable and immense without bound or measure : yet of these perfections no mention is made in that exalted canticle of praise, which was heard by the Prophet. It was the Sanctity, the wonderful and ravishing Sanctity of the God of Virtues, which the Seraphims proclaimed, and shall proclaim for evermore.

The second distinguishing character of the sanctity of God is the irreconcilable aversion he has for moral evil. The opposition there is between light and darkness, between life and death, is incomparably less than that, which subsists between God and sin, as is evinced by the punishment of the rebel Angels, of our first parents, and by the sufferings of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. The knowledge God has of his own adorable perfections, inspires him with an infinite hatred against all, that lessens his honour or robs him of the glory due to his holy name. Hence his injured sanctity calls upon his justice to vindicate his honour, by punishing the offence with the utmost rigour.

Thousands



Thousands of immortal Spirits with Lucifer at their head, shining in their robes of glory more brilliant than the sun, no sooner consented to a thought of consummate pride, than they were driven from the face of God, and fell like lightning into a lake of fire and brimstone, which was that instant made for their everlasting punishment. By the nobility and holiness of their first state, they were upon a level with the other illustrious Princes of heaven, now reigning in glory; but because they dared to trespass against the sovereign Sanctity of the most High, they were in a moment transformed from angels of light into fire-brands of hell. Blasted by the wrath of divine justice they lie ingulfed in raging flames, and the smoke of their torments ascends\* for ever and ever before the Lord. Tho' made according to the likeness of their great Creator, and made for everlasting happiness, they are for ever banished from his divine sight, because being sullied with the guilt of sin, they are

E 2

void

\* Rev. xiv.

void of that spotless robe of sanctity, without which no one can see God.

The heavy punishment, that followed the transgression of our first Parents in the terrestrial Paradise, is another instance, and a striking instance it is of God's implacable aversion to sin. Adam and Eve by an abuse of their free will having suffered themselves to be seduced into an act of disobedience, and to eat of the forbidden fruit, they that instant forfeited the grace of original righteousness, with which they had been endowed, and so lost their Creator's favour. The earth was cursed on their account, and they were driven out of the delightful garden, which had been assigned them for their happy abode. An increasing train of painful miseries accompanied them in their banishment, till death reduced their bodies to the grave, to mingle again with the common dust, of which they had been first formed. Their title to a supernatural life was also extinguished with their innocence, and the gate of heaven was barred against them and their whole

whole posterity, till full satisfaction should be made for the crime they had committed. Thus the whole human race groaned under the weight of God's displeasure, thus they sat in the shade of death, nor was there any prospect of relief or comfort for them, but in the hope of a promised Redeemer at some future time. The temporal deliverance of a chosen nation from the slavery of Egypt was all, that the religion and miraculous power even of a Moses could effect. Neither the faith of Abraham, nor the piety of David, nor the sighs and prayers of all the Patriarchs united together were sufficient to wipe out the stain of sin, or to atone for the offence, which had been committed against a God of infinite sanctity. From the infinite greatness of an offended Deity the offence contracted a degree of infinite guilt, which nothing less than infinite merit could fully expiate, and such merit was not to be found among the sons of men.

The second Person therefore of the most blessed Trinity, God, the Son, consub-

stantial and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, descended the heavens, and undertook by sufferings to repair the injury, which sin had done to the divine Sanctity. But being infinitely above the reach of grief or pain in his divine nature, he deigned to stoop to the condition of man, that he might suffer both. This is the strongest instance we can have of the hatred God bears against sin.

Jesus Christ, the splendour of his Father's glory, and the figure of his substance,\* was incapable of the least sin; but because he had assumed the form and likeness of a sinner, he was loaded with all the ignominy and sufferings due to sin. For he has truly borne our infirmities, and has carried our sorrows, as the Prophet foretold,† he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins, that by his bruises we might be made whole. In obedience to his own decree he received the bitter cup from his Father's hand, and he drank it to the very bottom. In submission to his Father's will  
he

\* Heb. i. † Isaiah C. liii.



he suffered every kind of painful ignominy, and being loaded with a heavy cross he was led forth to the mountain of Calvary, like a meek lamb to be sacrificed.\* His sacred hands and feet were bored with nails, which fastened him to the cross; the cross was set upright, and exposed him bleeding and naked to the outrages of an insulting multitude. The hatred God bears to sin, never appeared so great as at that awful hour. The eternal Son, now reduced by the malice of his enemies to the agony of death, was even bereft of all interior consolation in his soul, and on account of the debt of sin, which he had taken upon himself, seemed as if he were no longer the object of his Father's love. The bitter grief he felt in his sacred heart, forced from him this tender, this emphatical complaint; My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And under the grief of that mysterious dereliction, he gave up the ghost. §

E 4

Great

\* Jer. xi.      § Mat. xxvii.

Great God, how awful are thy judgments, how unsearchable thy decrees ! If such be thy aversion, and such thy punishment of sin, who of us will be justified in thy sight ? The nearer we come to contemplate thy Sanctity, the greater cause of alarm do we discover under the consciousness of our sinful wretchedness, knowing that thou dost not spare the delinquent. O God of Holies, our heart is troubled when we reflect, that every act and circumstance of our life is to be reviewed before the tribunal of thy inviolable Sanctity, and that all our thoughts, words, and works are to be weighed in the scale of thy divine justice. These things have I remembered, says the holy king David,\* and have poured forth all my soul within me. David took the silence of the morning to meditate upon them. Before his thoughts were disturbed by other business of the day, he addicted his early hours to the consideration of a subject, which demanded the attention of his whole mind.

In

\* Psalm xli.

In the morning, Lord, I will stand before thee, says he,\* and I will see. What is it, holy Prophet, that thou risest to see in God, which thus excites thy devotion, and calls forth all the faculties of thy soul to consider it well? Is it the splendour of his glory, is it the magnificence of his works, or the wonders of his almighty power, that thou hast to consider? These appear at every step in every part of the visible creation. Is it then the rigour of his justice, or the terrors of his wrath against his enemies? These indeed are striking subjects of consideration; but these the pious king had frequently considered, and in a sublime stile had written down his inspired sentiments upon them.

Among the attributes of God therefore, there is something else, which to the Prophet's eye appears still more striking, and still more awful, and this is his adorable sanctity. This he rose to meditate upon, this was the subject of his morning and most recollected thoughts. In the morning,

E 5

says

\* Psalm v.

says he, I will stand before thee, and will see, that thou art not a God, who wills iniquity. For neither shall the wicked dwell near thee, nor will thy holiness permit the ungodly to abide before thee. This supreme, this inviolable and sovereign holiness of God is what David beheld in spirit, and it is what he knew would present itself to him upon his first entrance into the regions of eternity.

The same important subject, which awakened the royal Prophet's attention in so lively a manner, ought also to awaken ours. Death will no sooner close our eyes, than a God, to whom the very appearance of sin is infinitely odious, will be presented to our view sitting upon his seat of majesty to receive and judge us. We shall stand and see. We shall see a God infinitely holy, omnipotent, eternal and immutable; a God no longer smiling with the offer of pardon, or waiting for our repentance, but shining in the terrors of impartial justice. In that single, that important moment, which is to decide our eternal lot, we shall  
see



see God our judge. But when that moment is once gone, whether we shall see that God again, is a mystery wholly hidden from us. And when will that important moment come? It is not known: perhaps this very night; it may come at any hour; it approaches nearer and nearer every time we breathe.

From this consideration of the divine Sanctity what are we to conclude, and what is the fruit we are to reap? It is to adore and imitate.

To respect, to honour and adore the sovereign holiness of a God infinitely great, is certainly the first duty, which nature itself inspires into every man, who knows his beginning and last end. This duty is moreover impressed upon him by the principles of his religion, as well as by the example of all holy men, who are gone before him. This the Angels in heaven teach him by the respectful homage, which they pay, and by the joyful canticles, which they incessantly sing, to the Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. To glorify God and

to sanctify his soul by the use of those means, which God himself has ordained for that purpose, is the great and essential duty of a Christian. But how neglectful, how deficient have we been in this point? What have we done to sanctify or to save our souls? How seldom have we thought of God, how little have we known him? Or to what has our knowledge served, but to offend him with greater guilt? Nothing then remains but to repent and change our lives. The tears and sighs of a contrite heart God will not reject.

To conceive a just horror and detestation of sin is, therefore, the second fruit we are to draw from this consideration of the divine Sanctity; and it is what God himself teaches us by the heavy pains, which he has inflicted, as well upon the fallen angels, as upon our sinful parents. Since sin is so odious to Almighty God, and so incompatible with his sanctity, how great ought to be our confusion, how intense our sorrow for having been guilty of it, and how sincere ought to be our purpose not to  
commit

commit it any more. Pierce, O Lord, my flesh with thy fear,\* was the penitential prayer of David ; and for a Christian, who knows to what dreadful punishments every deliberate transgression in a matter of weight exposes him, how is it possible not to fear, lest the allurements of temptation, and the corruption of his own weak heart, should gain the consent of his will, and betray him into some act of rebellion against the Lord his God ?

But the same holy sentiment, which dictates to the soul a wholesome fear and detestation of sin, inspires at the same time a chaste desire and affection for virtue. To love justice and to hate iniquity is in God but one indivisible act, which specifies that supreme, that unbounded, that self-existing sanctity of the divine nature, which shines with the purest beams of everlasting light, and will suffer no unclean spirit to approach or behold its glory. Therefore be ye holy, because I am holy,§ is the express precept of Almighty God to his people. St. Peter repeats

\* Psalm xviii.

§ Lev. xi.

repeats this precept to us in his first Epistle,\* and alledges the most cogent reasons, why all Christians ought to exert their best endeavours to fulfill it. 1st. Because, as children of obedience in the law of grace, they owe this duty to their heavenly Father. 2dly. Because they have been redeemed by the precious blood of the spotless and immaculate Lamb Christ. 3dly. Because by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, their faith and hope in God is confirmed. 4thly. Because they are born anew to a spiritual life, not of corruptible but of incorruptible seed, by the word of the living God, who abideth for ever. Such are the reasons St. Peter gives, why all Christians ought to aim at sanctity in every thing they do.

The motive, assigned in the sacred text for our being holy, is the most perfect, the most noble, and sublime; it is, because God himself is holy. It therefore sets no bounds to our endeavours, it confines us not to one only kind of duty, it comprehends

\* C. 1.



hends the whole compass of our lives, it regards all our words, all our actions, even all our thoughts and desires, or as St. Peter expresses himself, it obliges us to be holy in all our conversation,\* to the full extent of our zeal. Whoever is holy, let him become more holy still. § For our sanctification, says St. Paul, † is the undoubted will of God, who hath called us unto holiness, and hath given his holy Spirit in us.

Wherefore to purify the heart from sin, and from the affection of sin, is a duty, which the God of sanctity expects from all men. To sanctify the soul moreover by virtuous habits, and to acquire that degree of holiness, which forms the Christian character, is a professed duty, which he exacts from those, whom he has in a special manner blest and enlightened with the gift of faith. For since Jesus Christ our Saviour God has given himself for us, says St. Paul, † that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and

\* 1st Ep. St. Peter, C. 1.      § Rev. xxii.

† 1st Thes. iv.      † Tit. ii.

and purify unto himself a people, who should be acceptable to him, and who should adorn his doctrine by their purity of manners in every point, a constant integrity of conduct, and a certain holiness of life is now the duty of every Christian.

There should be holiness in our words, so that nothing unbecoming ever fall from our lips; nothing, that we should be afraid or ashamed of uttering before God, at the very foot of his throne. Holiness in our thoughts, so that we let not our fancy dwell with delight upon any forbidden object, or entertain itself with any thing, that can offend the eye of all-perfect Sanctity. Holiness in our affections, so that whether we eat, or whether we drink, or whatever else we do, we may by the purity of our intention, do all to the glory of God.\* Holiness in our actions, so that by our good example we may be a shining light † for men to glorify our Father, who is in Heaven. Holiness in fine in all our conduct, so that by no deliberate malice or  
notorious

\* 1 Cor. x.    † Mat. v.

notorious guilt we ever fully the purity of our souls, but always strive to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Be ye holy, God says to all men. Therefore to be holy in some degree is a most certain obligation incumbent upon all Christians, and not to aim at it is to give up their title to heaven. To be holy moreover in a greater degree, is an obligation equally pressing with respect to many individuals. 1st. With respect to those, who have been blessed with a more plentiful share of heavenly graces; for of him, who has received much, much will be exacted in return.\* 2dly. With respect to those, who have been greater sinners: for the more guilty they have been, the greater is the reparation they have to make. Great sins require great virtues for their atonement. 3dly. With respect to those, whom God by his special graces calls to a more eminent degree of virtue and Christian perfection. For some chosen souls there are, who are enriched with spiritual gifts far  
above

\* Luke xii.

above the portion of common mortals, and those gifts it is their duty to improve by improving in virtue. Whether it be one, two, five, or ten talents they receive, the parable \* in the Gospel leaves no room to doubt, but they are bound to increase them under pain of incurring the displeasure of their God. By the holy sentiments he inspires, by the heavenly lights he communicates, and by the sweet attractives of his grace, which he diffuses in their hearts, it is evident, that he expects more than an ordinary service from them, and that he will be satisfied with nothing less than sanctity in a superior degree. Thrice happy, if they enter into these gracious designs, and faithfully correspond with these special favours of Almighty God.

But, O God, how supine has been our negligence in this point? How little have we profited by the graces thou hast given us? And with the sanctity of our Christian profession how inconsistent has been the system of our lives? For little has been  
our

\* Mat. xxv.



our concern to know thy sanctity, and still less has been our study to honour it by our virtues. Penetrated with the most profound sentiments of our own nothingness, we acknowledge, O God, our past criminal neglect, and humbly ask forgiveness at the foot of thy throne. A sincere desire joined with a studious endeavour for the future to sanctify our souls according to the pattern thou hast shewn us, shall be the chief, and as far as in us lies, the daily occupation of our lives.

DISCOURSE

## DISCOURSE VI.

UPON THE POWER OF GOD.

*I am the all-powerful God. Genesis, c. xvii.*

v. 1.

**W**HEN God appeared to Abraham, and promised to make him the father of an innumerable offspring at a time, when there was not the least human probability of any such event, he roused his faith by telling him, that he was the omnipotent God; the God, who of himself is able to effect whatever he pleases on earth as well as in heaven. For he is the Lord God of all living creatures. Nothing is hard to him, says the Prophet Jeremiah.\* He is the most strong, the great, the powerful, the Lord of Hosts is his name. He alone has the principle of immortality from himself, he dwells in the midst of inaccessible light.† He is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords; the lives of mortals are at his disposal, he shortens or prolongs their days

\* C. xxxii. † 1 Tim. vi.

days at discretion : he holds the whole creation in his hand ; with a finger he turns the globe of the universe upon its hinges, and by his mighty arm, which reaches from end to end, he rules and directs all things with wisdom, fortitude, and justice.

Power therefore is an attribute not less glorious, than essential to the divinity. Whatever power we discover besides, is no more than a small emanation of that, which with plenitude resides essentially in God. Power in some sort is the most shining attribute of God, because by the wonders it has wrought, his greatness is manifested in a manner the most striking to our senses. To instance this we have but to cast an eye upon the visible creation, which must necessarily give us an idea the most sublime of the power that has made it. The power can be nothing less than infinite, nothing less than that of the most high God, who alone can make things out of nothing, who alone can lay his commands upon things that do not exist, and who as effectually can enforce obedience from them,

them, as tho' they had had an existence before he spoke.

From the deep and empty abyfs, in which no real being had been yet formed, the Almighty bade this wonderful creation rife. In obedience to his command it rofe with all the beauty, variety, and harmony of parts, that fhine with fuch magnificence throughout the whole. Great God, thou haft put on praife and beauty, exclaims the Prophet,\* thou art clothed with light as with a garment, thou haft ftretched out the heavens like a vaft pavilion, thou haft made the clouds thy chariot, thou walkeft upon the wings of the winds. Thou haft founded the earth upon its own bafis; the deep like a garment is its clothing. The mountains here afcend, there the vallies fink down between the hills, and receive the plenteous fstreams, which thou haft commanded to flow for their refreshment.

The bulky fize of the globe, that we inhabit, may to fhort-fighted mortals feem fomething great: its extenfive tracts of  
country

\* Pfalm civ.



country have furnished subject of contention to ambitious warriors, who commonly measure their ideas of worldly power by the extent of territory they are masters of. But, when compared with the whole circumference of the earth, how narrow and how circumscribed is the territory of the most extended empire that ever flourished? To its most partial admirer the Roman empire itself seemed to be no more than a little speck upon the wide surface of the earth. In this comparative point of view how small does even the earth appear, when we look up and consider those brighter orbs, that adorn the canopy of heaven? Their magnitude, their number, their distances, and motion indicate a power, that is infinite in Him, who formed them. Behold the numerous host of stars and planets, some rolling on with incredible velocity thro' the vast expanse, others seemingly fixed in the firmament of heaven, all shining with peculiar brightness, and each one forming within itself a separate and distinct world more extensive  
and

and more perfect than the globe, that we inhabit. Behold the immense frame of the universe, poised by its own weight without any other prop or support than the hand of God, who first made, who still moves and preserves it.

The production of the earth, sun, moon, and stars, out of nothing, is the wonderful work of God. And what did it cost him? It cost him but a single word. For he spoke says the Psalmist,\* and they were made, he commanded and they were created. The earth, the sea, the light, the heavens, and all the ornaments thereof, were not; he spoke, and behold they were. In an instant, at his word, at the first intimation of his will, all things emerged out of nothing into actual existence. For to will and to act, to design and execute, to command and to be obeyed, is but one and the self-same thing with God, whenever he is pleased to exert his absolute authority: and thus it was, that without the aid of any other power, without the least violence or  
any

\* Psalm xxxii.

any trouble to himself, he called instantaneously into being the vast variety of creatures, that we see, the wonderful works of nature, the grand and marvellous system of the world, which we so much admire and yet so imperfectly understand.

Now as God by his sovereign power has made one world out of nothing, so he can make another. But why do I say another? He can, if he pleases, make millions of worlds more extensive, more perfect, and more noble than the present. Nor by such an act, would his creative power be expended or yet diminished. For the same reason he has the power, if he chuses to exert it, to annihilate the things that are, and in an instant to wipe out every mark of their present existence, as tho' they had never been.

The rich, the great and pompous potentates of the earth glory in the sway they hold among their fellow mortals. They are stiled high and mighty in the language of men, they perhaps fancy themselves such in their own conceits. But what is their

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power,

power, and what is their greatness, if balanced with the power, which God has displayed in the creation? Placed by birth or by fortune upon a throne, they please themselves with the idea of the consequence it gives them. They plan stately palaces, they erect costly buildings for their use or for show, they levy mighty armies, and let fly the royal standard of authority. If in the field they are fortunate enough to found or extend an empire, the world flatters and admires; it presents them with the incense of applause, and idolizes them as demigods of the earth. To men, who judge merely of an object as it strikes their senses, this pageantry of power may seem real greatness. But in fact what is it? A specious varnish, or, to speak more properly, the glittering mark of their own self-insufficiency. For to carry their plans into execution, they are under the necessity of employing other hands, and ~~to~~ complete their projects of ambition they stand in need of a borrowed force, without which they can do nothing. If their schemes are  
therefore



therefore crowned with a success, which redounds either to their honour or their profit, it is chiefly to the exertions of their subjects, to the valour of their soldiers, and the conduct of their commanders, that they are indebted for it.

The Almighty stands in need of no such assistance. Whatever he does, he does by the strength of his own arm: for the execution of his designs he wants no help, no succour, nor subsidies from creatures. From himself and within himself he has a power equal to the extent of his decrees. The laws of nature are under his control: he alone directs their force, and in the course of events he either preserves or suspends their influence, as is suitable to the designs of his Providence, whether it be to protect his friends or to chastise his enemies.

In his heart the sinner said,\* I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, and be like the most High. But what ensued?

F 2

\* Isaiah xiv.

sued? The Lord of Hosts did but rise up, and without struggle hurled him in an instant down to hell, even into the depth of the burning lake. For the Lord is great in power, as the Prophet Nahum\* describes him in a language the most striking and sublime. The ways of the Lord, says he, are in a tempest and whirlwind, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He drains the rivers as he pleases, and turns their beds into a dry and barren desert, he rebukes the sea, and dries up the waters thereof. The hills and lonesome mountains shake under him, the flower of Libanon fades away, the beauty of Basan and Carmel perish: the earth, the world and all, who dwell therein, tremble in his presence. Before the face of his anger who shall stand? His anger is poured out like fire, and the rocks melt away before it. Warlike heroes, kings, and conquerors, in their height of glory, sink down with the trembling multitude before the omnipotent Lord of Hosts. A Nabuchodonosor, or a Pharaoh, opposed

to God, is but as grafs before the fcythe of the husbandman, which the first ftroke levels to the ground without noife, without labour, and without cost. For behold he shall tread them down like the mire of the streets, fays Ifaiah,\* he shall break the earthen vefsel with terrour; the tall of stature he shall cut down and the lofty he shall humble.

Lift up your minds, my Brethren, and in thought behold the omnipotent and eternal God fitting upon his throne of glory, arrayed with all the splendour of infinite Majesty, and ftretching forth his hand with absolute fway over the whole creation. Behold him in the actual exercife of an authority, which is unlimited in its power, univerfal in its extent, irrefiftible in its decrees, and ineffable in its effects. The power he displays, is inherent in his very nature; it is fupreme and infinite. It is a power, which gives him a fovereign right to order and to forbid whatever he pleafes, to diftribute punishments and rewards to

F 3

men,

\* C. x.

men, according to their deserts, to cite even kings and emperors before his tribunal, to judge and to dispose of them finally without appeal for eternity. Where are they, said the Prophet Baruch,\* where are those kings of the nations, who ruled over the earth, who gloried in their treasures, and wantonly sported with the lives of their fellow creatures? They have quickly disappeared, they are swept from the land of the living, and others have risen up in their stead. Where are those heroes of antiquity, once renowned for their skill and feats of war? They dwelt upon the earth, they partook of the common light for a time; but the way of wisdom they were strangers to. They therefore perished in their folly, they are gone down to the shades of death, they lie undistinguished with the rest of men, they are mouldered into dust, trodden under foot, and forgot.

The utmost extension therefore, that human power can partake of, is but short; it is shut up within the narrow bounds of life.



life. After the period of a few days, the Princes of the earth sink into the grave upon a level with their former subjects, stript of their prerogative, and of all their boasted consequence. I saw the sinner in his exalted station, says the royal Prophet,\* I saw him highly elated, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanon. I did but pass by, and he was no more. I looked round in search of him, but he was not to be found : even the place where he stood was not to be seen, nor could so much as a single mark be traced of his late existence. So impotent is the pride of man, that there needs but a single look from God, to level it with the dust.

The Almighty stood and measured the earth, says Habacuc,† he looked and dissolved the nations. For strength and power are in his hands. He touched the trembling hills, and they were instantly wrapt in smoke ; the ancient mountains burst in pieces, the rocks melted away like wax, the earth shook to its very center,

F 4

and

\* Psalm xxxvi.

† C. iii.

and the pillars of heaven were forced from their foundations. I heard, says St. John in his Revelations,\* I heard as it were an universal voice, and it was the voice of every living creature, which exists in heaven, and upon the earth, and in the sea. I heard them all crying out with one accord, Benediction, and Honour, and Glory, and Power to Him, who sitteth upon the throne for ever and ever. For great and wonderful are thy works, § Lord God omnipotent; just and true are thy ways, O king of ages. Who shall not fear thee, Lord, and magnify thy name?

Shall feeble man then dare to glory in his fancied might? Or shall sinful man presume, that he may with impunity transgress the commands of God, who suffers not the least deviation from the laws he has established, even in his inanimate creatures. To the sea he has said, † Hitherto thou shalt come and shalt go no further. The sea respects the divine mandate, and there it breaks its swelling waves. The boisterous  
element

\* C. v.      § C. xv.      † Job xxxviii.

element no sooner hears his powerful rebuke,\* than the storm subsides, and all is hushed into a peaceful calm. He has commanded the light to go forth,§ and it goes; he has called, and it obeys with trembling. The stars have given light in their watches and rejoiced; they were called, and they said, *Here we are*, and with cheerfulness they shined forth to him, who made them. For he is our God, they cry, and there is no other, who shall compare with him. How noble is this language of the inspired writers, and how expressive of the power, which characterises an omnipotent God.

When with a strong hand God led forth his people from the barbarous land of Egypt, the sea saw and fled. The sun and moon stood still to give them victory. Jordan divided its waters and turned back its course. At the presence of the Lord the earth was moved, at the presence of the God of Jacob. Such wonders justly raise our admiration, and fill our hearts with an awful respect for the power, that wrought them.

F 5

them.

\* Mat. viii.

§ Bar. C. iii.

them. Every day and every hour furnish us with instances of the same power, which appear equally great and wonderful to those, who duly consider them. They perhaps excite our admiration less, because more familiar to our senses; but they are not less wonderful in themselves, or less expressive of the divine power.

What is it but the active power of God, which in the order of nature preserves and continues on the same motion, the same beauty, the same subordination and harmony, that he first established in the visible parts of the creation? This is the power, that directs the course of the heavens, that presides over the rising and setting of the sun, that regulates the times and seasons of the year, that sends forth timely rains and warmth to quicken the earth in its various productions for the support and comfort of human life. This is the power, which in the order of civil society forms the tie of nations, which gives to empires their stability, to kings their authority, and to laws the force of binding the consciences of men.

This



This in fine is the power, which in the order of grace appears still more excellent, because accompanied with mysteries the most sacred and sublime, which without a special revelation we never could have known.

God the Son, consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father in one and the same nature, has descended from heaven for our salvation. God is become man\* by uniting the divine and human nature together in one person. A God of infinite power has therefore put on weakness for our sake. A God of infinite sanctity has assumed the form of a sinner, that he might be capable of suffering, and by suffering restore to us the title of inheritance, which had been forfeited by the sin of our first parents. The formation of the heavens had been but the work of his fingers, § but in the work of our redemption he has exerted the might of his arm. † For by this he has broken down the gates of hell and overturned the empire of Satan. Upon the ruins of idolatry he

F 6

has

\* John C. i.

§ Psalm viii.

† Luke C. i.

has founded to himself an everlasting kingdom. By the doctrine, death and merits of Jesus Christ our Redeemer he has formed to himself a holy and acceptable people in the establishment of a religion equally sublime in its articles of belief, as it is holy in its principles of morality.

This is the religion, which in its beginning was to the Jews a scandal, and to the Gentiles seemed no better than mere folly, but which in the course of a few years was warmly cherished and embraced by Jew and Gentile. In vain did persecutors whet the sword for its destruction; in vain did tyrants strive by penal threats and statutes to prevent its growth. Without any other power to support it than that of its own divine author, and with all the powers of human eloquence and the prejudice of passions to oppose it, the Christian religion soon spread thro' the universe. Small as a grain of mustard, which in its seed is the least of plants, it first diffused its branches from the banks of Jordan to the sea, and from the sea even to the extremities of the earth.

In

In every corner of the globe it has set up the triumphant standard of the cross; and notwithstanding the ridicule, which a mistaken zeal or a licentious incredulity has constantly endeavoured to cast upon it, we behold it still continuing, as it first began, to triumph in the purity of its doctrine, in the virtues of its followers, in the union and subordination of its members. How glorious, how eminent does the power of God here appear? It is the power he promised\* to exert for the maintenance of his Church, against which no devices of men and no efforts of Satan ever shall prevail.

Great God, what tongue can express, or what heart conceive the power thou art possessed of? Shall ungrateful man, instead of adoring, dispute the wonders thou hast wrought? Shall presumptuous man pretend to restrain thy operations, or to deny thy revealed mysteries, because he does not understand them? Thou wouldst not be infinite, thou wouldst not be divine, if thou couldst do no more, than human reason can  
account

\* Mat. xvi.

account for. Unless we renounce our reason, my Brethren, we must necessarily grant, that God in his omnipotence can do infinitely more, than we in our weakness can possibly comprehend. To pronounce peremptorily upon a point, which is manifestly above the reach of our comprehension, and to say it cannot be, denotes not the act of a prudent nor yet of a very wise man. Not only vain, but wicked must be the man, who being equally ignorant of himself and God, shall presume to measure the extent of divine power by the narrow limits of his own understanding. But there is a knowledge, which God has hidden from the wise in their own conceits, and revealed only to his little ones.\*

We therefore depend on God not only in the things we see, but likewise in the things he proposes to our belief; nor can we rationally doubt of, much less can we deny the truths he has spoken to us. For to him nothing is impossible.† In the order either of grace or of nature there is nothing, which

\* Mat. xi.

† Luke i.



which we have not received and actually hold from him. By him we have been created, by him we are still preserved, and by him we have been redeemed from the jaws of hell. As our Creator he has drawn us out of nothing, where we had lain for eternity, and where we should still lie for an eternity to come, without the possibility of ever knowing, of ever seeing, or of ever enjoying him. As our Preserver he continues to us the existence, which he once gave. For we should immediately sink into our original nothingness without the support of that saving hand, which first formed us. As our Redeemer he has paid the ransom of our souls; by his death upon a cross he has rescued us from the slavery of sin, and restored to us the happy liberty we had lost, of securing our election to a crown of immortal glory.

Hence the dominion, which God holds over us is universal and supreme. At all times, in all places, in every circumstance of life, even in the things we believe and hope for, our whole and sole dependence is  
on

on God. The beginning and the end of our existence here, our exaltation and our fall, our life and death, our present and our future state are at his disposal. For we are but as weak and brittle vessels formed by the potter's hand, which he may preserve or break, when he pleases. Death breaks the bonds of our dependence upon men, but it puts us into the state of a more immediate and more absolute dependence upon God. For the privilege of free will shall then cease; when life is gone, we shall no longer have the power of acting, or of chusing for ourselves. By the definitive and irrevocable sentence, which he shall then pronounce, his dominion over us will take a fresh date, which no succession of ages and no end of time shall ever alter.

His dominion over nations and empires is not less absolute and supreme. By the quick revolution of events, which his powerful hand directs, the face of the earth is always changing. Fresh generations rise and and fall at his command. The strength of nations sinks down, and the once most flourishing

rishing kingdoms disappear. Babylon and Ninive, the boast of antient times, are no more, the very fragments of their glory are dispersed, nor can the spot, where they formerly stood, be even ascertained. For behold the sovereign disposer of all things sitteth, says Ifaiah,\* above the vast circle of the earth, who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, who with three fingers hath poised the bulky globe, and weighed the heavens with his palm.

A God, invested with such marks of almighty power, equally commands our respect and confidence.

1st. He commands our confidence: because he has not only the power, but the will also to help and to save us, if we are only disposed to co-operate with him in the work of our salvation. For he is our Father, he is a loving and a tender Father to those, who love him. Should I walk in the midst of the shades of death, says the royal Prophet, § I should fear no harm, because the Lord is with me. Tho' a whole  
host

\* C. xl.      § Psalm xxii.

host of foes should rise up and make war against me, my heart will not fear.\* For from whom shall I fear, while the Lord is my salvation, or of whom shall I be afraid, while he protects my life? His bounteous eye is always turned upon those, who trust in him, and his ears are ever open to their prayers. Out of the many troubles, that afflict them, he will deliver his faithful servants in due season, he will rescue them out of the hands of their most deadly enemies, and if in the conflict any temporal calamities befall them, he will reward their fidelity with such munificence, as bears no proportion with the short sufferings they undergo. Thus has he supported his Confessors and Virgins in their struggles for virtue; thus has he strengthened his Martyrs, and granted them victory over death itself; thus in fine for the reward of our services has he prepared in heaven such treasures, such a magnificence of glory, as none but the blessed themselves can conceive.

2dly. The power of God commands  
our

\* Psalm xxvi.



our respect. It is natural to respect and fear those, on whom we depend. We are always in the hands of God : he is our sovereign Lord both for time and eternity. If he is great in his rewards of virtue, he is no less terrible in his punishments of vice. Whenever the malice of sinners calls down his vengeance on them, it overwhelms, it crushes them with its weight. Wherefore I say to you, my friends, says our blessed Saviour,\* be not terrified at those, who can do you no more than a passing injury. They may indeed destroy the body, but your soul they cannot hurt. But I will show you, whom you are to fear : fear him, who after death can cast both body and soul into hell, if you die in his disgrace. Yes, I say, fear him.

3dly. It is our duty to respect the power of God even in his substitutes. For the maintenance of due subordination and union, without which no human society can subsist, God has appointed his Ministers and delegates on earth, who from him have received

\* Luke xii.

received a power to govern, to instruct and direct us in our duty. To them therefore, on account of the rank they hold, is respect and obedience strictly due. This all sovereigns have a right to from their subjects, all pastors from their flock, all parents from their children, and all masters from their servants. The honour paid to them, is paid to God himself; for they hold his place, they are his representatives and vicerents in the external government of his people. Therefore whoever resists those, who are in power, resists the ordinance of God himself, as St. Paul tells the Romans.\*

4thly. The power of God is to be respected even by those, who are invested with a portion of it. For the power they have received, is no other than a delegated and subordinate power, which God has imparted to them for his own glory and the good of mankind; it is a temporary power, which they must soon resign into the hands of Him, who gave it: it is a limited power, which as Christians and servants of the most

most high God, they are obliged to use with moderation, justice and discretion, for such purposes, as right order and reason call for, and not as pride and fancy shall direct. The preservation of union and peace amongst men, the suppression of vice, the encouragement of virtue, the support of the weak, and the relief of the indigent are objects, which no persons in power should ever lose sight of. Men of authority never should forget, that they also have a Master in heaven, to whom they are accountable for the very power they now enjoy. For power says the sacred text,\* has been given them by the Lord, and strength by the most High, who will examine their works, who will search their thoughts, and pass judgment on them. For God will not except any man's person, neither will he stand in awe of any man's greatness, for he made the little and the great.

O God, thou alone art great, thou alone art the Lord of Heaven and of earth. Within the compass of thy unbounded domain

\* Wisdom C. vi.

main all things are placed, all creatures are subject to thy control, and there is none, that can resist the force of thy decrees: thou rulest all with sovereign wisdom, goodness, and justice, nor has any one a right to question the equity of thy proceedings. By thy power this vast universe first began, and soon as the course of ages, which thou has fixt, shall be complete, by thy power it will also end. Then shall every mark of worldly grandeur be blotted out; then shall the world itself and all we covet in it, finally pass away. But thou, great God, shalt reign omnipotent with thy Elect in glory, and thy reign shall last for evermore.

O reflect, ye deluded followers of a faithless world, reflect what it is to let go the eternal inheritance of another life for the fleeting vanities of this. What weakness is it to spend yourselves in catching at an empty shadow, which has the power only to excite, not to satiate your desires? And what blindness is it, for the glimmering prospect of some temporal felicity to give up the pursuit of that, which is eternal?

The



The least of the Blessed in heaven is possessed of joys, which all the joys of this world put together cannot equal; he is possessed of a happiness, which shall last, he is crowned with glory, that shall shine, when every glimpse of worldly glory shall be lost in everlasting night. Be it then, my Brethren, your sole ambition to be great in heaven; it is the only ambition worthy of an immortal soul.

O God, we humbly bow down before thee: we adore thy sovereign power: we own our dependence on thee. Dispose of us as thou plearest. We are wholly thine; there is nothing we possess, but what belongs to thee. All the blessings of life, the senses and faculties of soul and body are thy gracious gifts. O grant, we may make no other use of them, than is conducive to thy honour and our own salvation! To be fervent and steady in our duty to thee, is the grace we humbly beg. We beg for nothing but what thou canst easily grant, nothing but what thou art inclined to grant: for thy goodness is equal to thy power.

Thine

Thine is the goodness, and thine is the power, which has given sight to the blind, health to the sick, and life to the deceased. Thy arm is not shortened, nor is thy mercy lessened. Wherefore enlighten us with the knowledge of thy adorable perfections, heal us by thy grace, and raise us from the grave of sin by the quickening gift of zeal in thy holy service. For unless we join our own endeavours to the succours thou givest, imperfect yet will be the work of our salvation. Grant us then, O God, the special grace of co-operation, without which thy other gifts will be of no avail.

DISCOURSE

## DISCOURSE VII.

UPON THE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF GOD.

*O the Depth of the Riches of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God. Rom. c. xi. v. 33.*

THE knowledge and wisdom, which God displays in all his works, appeared so sublime and wonderful to St. Paul, that he seems to be at a loss for words, how to convey to us the idea he had of their supreme excellence. He had been rapt to the third heaven,\* he had there learnt such secrets, as no human tongue can explain : he had seen the vast, unbounded essence of the Divinity laid open like a deep and rich mine before him. Fixed in amazement, and unable to repress the glowing emotions of his soul, he with emphasis exclaims, O the depth, O the fathomless and inexhaustible depth of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, which an all-perfect God encloses within his bosom !

The Knowledge of God is a pure and self-existing light, by which he knows, sees,  
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and

\* 2 Cor. C. xii.

and enlightens all things. By this he sees thro' the very essence of the heavenly Spirits, by this he discerns the most hidden secrets of the human heart. Nor is there any creature invisible in his sight, says St. Paul,\* but all things are open and exposed to his all-penetrating eye. In the brightness of his own divine essence he beholds, as in a resplendent mirror, all things clearly and distinctly. Without division, without confusion, without any multiplicity or succession of ideas, he surveys the vast and unlimited variety of objects, that his omnipotence can at any time create, together with every individual circumstance, that can possibly attend and vary the mode of their existence. For by one comprehensive act of his divine mind he reaches thro' the whole extent of times and places, and intuitively beholds at once all the Beings, that ever were or that ever can be beheld or known. His ever-watchful eye darts thro' the boundless compass of eternity. It stretches beyond the highest heavens, it pierces

\* Heb. iv.



pierces into the deep abyfs, and equally discerns whatever paffes in the thickeft darknefs, as in the cleareft light.

To God therefore nothing is unknown, from him nothing can be concealed, nothing hidden. Every event, that happens throughout the universe, every minute change, that time and nature daily work in the different parts of the creation, every affection and defire, that riles in the heart of man, the fecret plans and fchemes of the moft difcontiguous nations, the defigns and actions of the whole human race, that have been and fhall be from the beginning to the end of time, are all at once prefent to the divine mind: neither is there any thing however great, or however little in heaven, or on earth, or in the deepeft receffes under the earth, which falls not under his immediate knowledge. For being immense, he is every where prefent; being omnifcient, nothing can efcape his notice, and being omnipotent, nothing can obftruct his fight. Sinners may diffemble, they may affume the fmiles of innocence, and deceive mankind;

kind; but they shall be never able to deceive a God, who beholds their heart, and scrutinizes the hidden secrets of their conscience. For he is always near, he always hears, and always sees them: he is at once the witness and the judge of all they do. The Lord hath looked from heaven, says the Psalmist,\* he hath beheld all the sons of men: from his habitation, which he hath prepared, he hath looked down upon all, who dwell upon the earth. He hath made the heart of every one of them, and understandeth all their works.

The Knowledge of God is therefore infinite, because in one unlimited point of view he knows all, that can possibly be known. The Wisdom of God is also infinite for the same reason; because by one comprehensive act of his understanding he fathoms all, that can possibly exist. This divine Wisdom, which ever way we consider it, whether absolutely in itself, or relatively to us, is equally admirable, equally adorable, because equally vested with every quality,  
that

\* Psalm xxxiii.

that challenges our homage. It is infinitely sublime in its ideas ; for it comprehends the whole infinite extent of the divine perfections : it is infinitely holy in its ordinances ; for it ordains all to the greater glory of God : it is infinitely enlightened in its operations ; for it enlightens every man, that cometh into the world : it is infinitely benevolent in its desires ; for it desires, that all men may be saved : it is infinitely amiable in its dispositions ; for it intends and sweetly disposes all things for our final happiness : it is inexhaustible in its resources ; for innumerable are the means, which it has in store for the attainment of its ends : it is impenetrable in its counsels, which we are commanded to revere : it is adorable in its decrees, which no human understanding can presume to fathom : it is in fine consolatory in the very chastisements it sends us ; for it thereby opens our minds to the eternal truths, and prepares our souls for those unspeakable comforts, which are reserved for our reward in heaven.

Holy Job,\* who was inspired with an eagerness to know the nature of divine Wisdom, employed every power of his soul, and tried every mode of reasoning to find it out. For this purpose he dived into the deep recesses of the earth and sea, and with the keenest penetration examined into all, that was great and wonderful in nature. In the structure and harmony of the universe he discovered marks of a most consummate Wisdom, but he found not Wisdom itself. He then strove to form some notion of its value by comparing it with the most precious metals, with the richest gems and the most costly dyes of India. Of these, by comparing their qualities one with the other, he was enabled to estimate the worth; but of the worth of Wisdom he could not yet form the smallest notion. For silver, and gold, and precious stones, the sardonyx, the topaz, and the sapphire; he found to be as dirt, or as a grain of sand § with respect to Wisdom.

Where then is this divine Wisdom to be  
found,

\* Job, C. xxviii.

§ Wisdom vii.



found, continues Job, and in what part of the globe does it lie concealed? Wearied as it were in the fruitless search, he at last addresses himself to the different parts of the creation, as they occur to his mind, and asks them separately, where is the seat of Wisdom? The deep abyss replies, it is not here, and the sea declares aloud, it is not with me. Wisdom is hidden from the eyes of mortal men, nor is it to be met with in the land of those, who live in delights. Destruction and death cry out, we once were told, and with our ears we have heard the same thereof, but now it is far removed, it is withdrawn for ever from our sight. The value therefore and the ways of Wisdom are known only to God, concludes the holy man, because only God is acquainted with its secrets. God alone can comprehend the place of its abode. God stretches his all-seeing eye from one extremity of the world to the other, comprises in a point the whole circumference of heaven, and within the bosom of his own unconfined immensity

beholds the divine seat, where Wisdom for ever dwells.

Yes, from the beginning, and before the world was I created, says Wisdom itself,\* and unto the world to come I shall not cease to be, and in the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before him. I sprung from the mouth of the most High, the first-born before all creatures. Before any thing was yet made, § I had an existence, and my existence is from eternity. The depths were not yet formed, and I was already conceived. The Almighty had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers nor the poles of the earth. The mountains with their ponderous bulk had not as yet been established, neither had the fountains of waters begun to flow. Before the hills I was brought forth. I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven, † and have penetrated into the bottom of the deep, and have walked in the waves of the sea, and have stood in all the earth. For I was present, ‡ when he prepared the heavens ;

\* Eccl. C. xxiv. § Prov. C. viii. † Eccl. C. xxiv.

‡ Prov. C. viii.

heavens ; when he framed the universe, and disposed the parts thereof in that wonderful and beauteous order, in which they now appear. I was with him playing in all his works, and was delighted with the harmonious system he was forming. When he balanced the foundations of the earth, when he compassed the sea with its bounds, that it might not trespass upon the dry land, when he poised the shining orbs of the firmament upon their own bases, when he expanded the sky above, and measured out the different seasons of the year, I assisted at his counsels, and directed his all-creative power.

Therefore blessed are they, who keep my ways, and observe my precepts ; for it is my delight to dwell with the children of men. It is by me, that kings and princes rule. With me is honour and glory and riches, better than gold and the precious stone : for mine are the treasures of prudence, of equity, of fortitude and justice, that I may enrich those, who love me. Wherefore blessed is the man, who watches

daily at my gate to find me, and waits at my door to hear my instructions. For he, who finds me, shall find life, and receive salvation from the Lord. Such is the portrait, which divine Wisdom has drawn of herself in the inspired writings. Such is the sublime excellence of the virtues she possesses, and such are the virtues she desires to impart to the sons of men.

But the sons of men seldom seem disposed to co-operate with the views of their creator. Amidst the noise and hurry of a busy world they give themselves but little time to know his will. Instead of listening to the lessons, or of adopting the principles of his divine wisdom, they too commonly adopt quite other principles, and to their misfortune follow a profane and worldly wisdom of their own: a false wisdom, full of artifice and deceit; an intriguing wisdom, inspired by self-love, guided by human respects, and swayed by sordid interest; a political wisdom, which teaches its followers to be fine adepts in the arts of dissimulation and hypocrisy; a wisdom  
in fine,



in fine, which makes them knowing and alert in every pursuit, but that of their last end.

Hence the science of salvation is but little cultivated in the world, and still less encouraged. Hence notwithstanding the boast of an enlightened age, Christians appear in a manner ignorant or wholly careless of the only knowledge that can make them happy, the knowledge of religion. Habituated to hear and see little else, than what flatters either their senses or their passions, they turn their thoughts to the study of those things only, which may make them pleasing and accomplished in the world. Instead of useful and instructive reading, they stock their minds with the loose romantic notions, which the circulating light compositions of the age present them with. Here from their earliest youth they become acquainted with such real or fictitious transactions, as only serve to fire the imagination, to excite their passions, to make them fond of themselves, fond of flattery, fond of finery, fond of an idle and a dissipated life.

Strangers to the sober and frugal virtues, that adorn the walks of domestic happiness, they range at large thro' the fields of worldly delights, they hurry from place to place, from one amusement to another, without enjoying any, they weary themselves in the ways of vanity, they lose themselves in the labyrinth of expence, and forget they are Christians. The desire of pleasing or the fear of displeasing, the art of knowing how to suit the inclinations of men, and to humour the extravagant fashions of the times, constitute in a great measure the wisdom of the world : and as it is a fashionable wisdom extremely flattering to flesh and blood, no wonder it prevails in almost every rank and condition of mankind.

Guided by this false wisdom, the father of a family is careful to fashion his son sometimes according to the maxims of the world. He inspires him with the spirit of the world, he initiates him in the principles of the world, he forms him to the practices of the world, without distinguishing the right from the wrong, and provided he can only make  
him

him figure with his equals in the manners of the world, he cares not how little he shows of the manners of a Christian.

Inspired with this false wisdom, a worldly-minded mother applies herself to the training up of her daughter in all those polished modes of education, which are more adapted to make her pleasing in the eyes of men, than in the eyes of her Creator. Too fine herself to be acquainted with the homely virtues of retirement, of piety, of prayer, and regularity in her family, she as little thinks of teaching them by word of mouth, as she is far from recommending them by example. She then produces the darling object of her care into life, she decks her out with excess of finery, and sets her up as the idol of pride and self-complacency to court and receive the incense of her flattering admirers.

Animated with this false wisdom, the ambitious man in order to gratify his desires studies every art, and adopts every measure, that he thinks conducive to his ends : and tho' the supplanting of a friend,  
the

the forfeiture of his word or the renouncing of his principle may be required of him to gain the object he has in view, he will wickedly pride himself upon his superior prudence for having taken the only step, that could effectually promote his designs.

Blinded by this false wisdom, the avaricious man directs his whole attention to the accumulation of worldly wealth. With this view he watches every opportunity, and puts in practice whatever means seem the best suited to his purpose, without so much as reflecting, whether those means are lawful or not, whether they are conformable or repugnant to the first duties of a Christian. It is enough for him, that they furnish an increase to his former store : and tho' in the eagerness of his pursuits he should at times descend to such practices, as must vilify him in the opinion of every honest man, he will notwithstanding that criminally exult in private for the success he has had, and consider it as the crown of his judicious industry.

Such false, such earthly, and such carnal  
wisdom,



wisdom, tho' countenanced by such numbers as it is, cannot fail of being most hateful to God; being set up in direct opposition to his divine wisdom, it provokes his severest anger. For the wisdom of the wise I will destroy, says he,\* and the understanding of the prudent I will reject. Nor is the wisdom of God less conspicuous than his anger in the very punishments he inflicts. For in chastising the follies of men he oftentimes employs no other means to overthrow their wicked projects, than what they themselves had chosen to establish their success. The youth for instance, on whom no pains and no expence had been spared for his advancement in the world, far from seconding the worldly views of his parents, turns out by the just dispositions of a wise God the very reverse of what they expected, and instead of honour brings disgrace upon his family.

The ambitious man is often suffered to rise to the highest pinnacle of honour, that by his disgrace the chastisement of his pride

\* 1 Cor. C. i.

pride may be the more striking. Thus the avaricious man, who had fancied he should be happy in his heaps of wealth, finds them in the end to be only heaps of discontent, either gnawing his heart with bitter trouble, or tormenting his mind with an insatiable desire of getting more. So true it is, that every pretension to wisdom, which has not duty for its principle, is mere folly: its beginnings may perchance yield some glimmering rays of hope to inconsiderate men, but its end is sure to conclude in disappointment and regret. For the Lord in his wrath hath spoken,\* I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will bring to nought the understanding of the prudent. The world itself daily experiences and fulfils the truth of this heavy threat in the confusion and disgrace, which an all-wise God directs it to heap upon its devoted followers.

But notwithstanding these visible strokes, by which God is daily pleased to confound the wisdom of the world, nothing is so common,

\* Isaiah C. xxix.

common as to see Christians sacrificing their days, their conscience, and their reason to its pernicious maxims. Flattered by the smooth and delusive language of a refined Philosophy, they let themselves be easily persuaded, that a familiarity with the world is not so dangerous, as is usually represented from the pulpit, and that as long as their heart is good, the essentials of virtue will not suffer. Under this deceitful notion many unwary Christians have rushed into the midst of temptations, formed dangerous connexions, and at last engaged in a habit of sin, without perceiving the gulf into which they fell. For they fell not all at once, as no one comes to the height of immorality on a sudden. \* Restrained by principle, or by the early habits of a good education, they at first kept their ground: but as they advanced by degrees, and became more acquainted with the world, those early habits began to wear off, and many neglects of duty took place. The grace of God was however still working within them; it warned them of their danger, it reminded them

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But notwithstanding these visible strokes, by which God is daily pleased to confound the wisdom of the world, nothing is so common,

\* Isaiah C. xxix.



common as to see Christians sacrificing their days, their conscience, and their reason to its pernicious maxims. Flattered by the smooth and delusive language of a refined Philosophy, they let themselves be easily persuaded, that a familiarity with the world is not so dangerous, as is usually represented from the pulpit, and that as long as their heart is good, the essentials of virtue will not suffer. Under this deceitful notion many unwary Christians have rushed into the midst of temptations, formed dangerous connexions, and at last engaged in a habit of sin, without perceiving the gulf into which they fell. For they fell not all at once, as no one comes to the height of immorality on a sudden. \* Restrained by principle, or by the early habits of a good education, they at first kept their ground: but as they advanced by degrees, and became more acquainted with the world, those early habits began to wear off, and many neglects of duty took place. The grace of God was however still working within them; it warned them of their danger, it reminded them

them of their duty, it checked them with remorse, and filled their souls with a lively apprehension of being eternally lost. But dallying with the temptation, and being pleased with the objects, that allured their senses, they stifled those interior admonitions. Instead of having recourse to those spiritual helps, which God in his wisdom has ordained for the support of the soul in her distresses, they now shunned the light, they were afraid of being disturbed in their dreams of happiness, they neither would examine nor admit advice. Thus being exposed to the illusions of their own self-sufficiency, they fell into great errors, and their errors hurried them into the broad way, that leads to perdition. A perplexed obscurity, like a mist, then overspread their minds, and the lamp of faith growing more and more dim, they became strangely prejudiced in favour of their worldly notions. They set up arguments to justify their errors, they reasoned upon false principles, and formed to themselves a false conscience, so that they became callous to the stings of remorse,

remorse, amidst the greatest irregularities. A blindness of the understanding, an obduracy of heart, and an obstinacy in sin being thus gradually brought on, final impenitence is usually the dreadful consequence.

Such, my Brethren, are the steps, by which the wisdom of the world insensibly leads its deluded followers to destruction. This is the wisdom, which descends not from above, but which springs from the earth, as St. James testifies,\* and is infused by the prince of darkness into the minds of thoughtless Christians. There, grafted on the stock of human pride, it is formed by self-conceit, nourished by vanity, and propagated by fashion, till loaded with the fruits of vice and infidelity, it is at last cut down by death, and cast, like cockle, into the fire to be burnt. Men of the present generation seem not disposed to hear or to believe these alarming truths; but the day will come, when they and the world itself shall believe them, tho' too late for their salvation.

O divine

\* C. iii.

O divine Wisdom, come timely to our aid, and dispel the clouds of infidelity, that gather from every quarter round us. Come, and point out our way through the dark and intricate mazes, that divide and perplex our progress. Under thy direction we shall never err, under thy guidance we we shall never stray. Under the influence of thy divine rays enlightened will be our reason, considerate will be our words, and prudent will be our steps in the pursuit of our last end. For they, who are actuated with thy spirit, always keep their last end in view, and steadily pursue it.

Wherefore let us, my Brethren, be assured, that as God alone is the source of true wisdom, so we can no otherwise partake of its fruits, than by making its maxims the rule of our conduct. To secure our salvation it is not enough to know what true wisdom is; we must moreover conform our practice to the dictates of that knowledge. This is the knowledge, which has roused the faith, and animated the zeal of all faithful believers in every age; this is the knowledge, which



which disclosed to them the emptiness of all transitory enjoyments, and pushed them on in the acquisition of such, as should never end: this is the knowledge, which opened to them the prospect of being one day happy with the Blessed in heaven, and made them conclude, that no preparation could be deemed too great, and no care superfluous, while an eternity of happiness was yet pending. This, my Brethren, is important knowledge; this is the true and only wisdom we are to consult in the regulation of our lives and manners. All other pretended knowledge in point of morals, call it prudence, call it wisdom, or what other name you please, as long as it leads us from our last end, is nothing less than folly and deception.

Hence in the second place we cannot but see, how deplorable the blindness is of those, who are so wholly engaged either in the cares or amusements of the present life, as to allow themselves no time to think of, or to provide for the next. In the height of their prosperity, while the world smiles and

and caresses them, they forget the glorious crown, which is prepared for them in heaven, and foolishly forsake the narrow and the only path, that leads to it. Intoxicated with the cup of worldly enchantments, they give up the joys of heaven; they let go an everlasting substance to catch at a fleeting shadow. The virtues of the gospel are by them deemed too vulgar to make a part of their plan of life. With pity or contempt they look down upon the man, who has virtue enough to withstand the allurements of vice, who prefers the testimony of an upright conscience to the flattering offers of improving his fortune.

But how different will their sentiments and their language be, when at the last day they shall stand arraigned before the tribunal of an all-knowing God? The Holy Ghost informs us.\* Then shall the Just stand with great constancy, says the sacred text, opposite to those, by whom they were once afflicted. With fruitless repentance and unavailing groans shall the wicked say,  
pointing

\* Wisdom v.

pointing to the Just, These are they, whom we formerly held in derision and contempt: fools as we were, we esteemed their life no better than madness, and their end void of honour. But, behold, they are now ranked with the Children of God, and among the Saints will be their happy lot for eternity. We have therefore erred from the way of truth; the light of justice hath not shined unto us, nor hath the sun of understanding risen upon us. We walked thro' hard ways, we took great pains to work our ends, but the way of the Lord we did not know. What profit then have we derived from pride, and what advantage has the boasting of our riches brought us? They are passed away, like a shadow, so have we also ceased to be. Our imaginary greatness vanished with our lives; endless misery is the punishment of our folly.

Hence in the third place we see, how much it behoves us to be upon our guard. Nothing so effectually saps the foundation of faith, and nothing so strongly draws us from the duties of religion, as an inordinate attachment

attachment to the world. Therefore the beloved Apostle charges us not to settle our affection on the world, nor on the things that are in it.\* For we are easily, and we are pleasingly seduced, when we are once in love with our seducer. The world flatters us with its vanities, and seduces us by its maxims. The language it speaks, and the example it gives, make strong impressions upon an unguarded heart: they poison our thoughts, they awaken our passions, and insensibly dispose us to run into the greatest disorders. By frequently conversing with the loose and unprincipled part of mankind, we learn to think, to speak and act, as they do. The securest means of guarding our innocence is to shun the danger of losing it. For whoever loves the danger, will perish in it.† The world will probably laugh at our prudence and call it folly.

But let us reflect, and it is the reflection I will end with, that as there is a reputed wisdom, which is real folly, so there is likewise a reputed folly, which is true wisdom in the

\* 1 Ep. c. ii.

† Eccl. iii.



in the sight of God. The doctrine of the Cross, says St. Paul,\* is folly in the opinion of those, who do not believe : but to those, who truly believe, it conveys the most convincing proofs of the power and wisdom of God. To be humble, chaste, and poor by choice, to submit patiently for conscience sake to the penal decrees of persecution and oppression, and to give up the inviting pursuits of interest and ambition for the duty of following Jesus Christ the crucified, is with God the height of wisdom ; but to the world it is, as it was of old, a stumbling-block to the Jews, and folly to the Gentiles. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are the judgments of God exalted above the judgments of men, and therefore he has chosen the foolish things of this world, that he may confound the wise. To which of the two is it more reasonable to conform, to God or to the world ? Which of the two shall we follow, which shall we serve ? It is impossible to serve them both.†

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\* 1 Cor. c. i.

† Mat. vi.

The one leads to everlasting happiness, the other to everlasting misery.

To God we must humbly have recourse.

To God we must earnestly address our prayer, that he would please to enlighten and guide us in our choice. For no mortal man can come to a perfect knowledge of his duty, unless God shall give wisdom, and send his holy Spirit from above. Without his divine light we wander in the dark, without his unerring guidance we are liable to a thousand errors and illusions, nor in a variety of objects can we be ever certain of the things, that are acceptable to him.\* Grant us then, O God, that heavenly Wisdom, which sitteth by thy throne; send her forth from thy holy heaven, that she may be always with us, that she may always aid, always direct and teach us to do thy will in every step we take.

O celestial Light, that enlightenest the souls of men, how wretched must be the Christian, who shall shut his eyes against thy bounteous rays? More blind than the man,  
who

\* Wisdom c. ix.

who from his birth never saw the sun, he passes his life in an uninterrupted darkness, or if at times he catches some faint glimmerings of light, they are but the glimmerings of a deceitful light, which, like a nightly vapour rising from the earth, only shines to dazzle and mislead him.

Yes, the corruptible body we carry is a load upon the soul, and the clog of clay, that invests us, presses down the mind of man, that muses upon many things.\* True wisdom alone either takes away the burden of our misfortunes, or teaches us how to bear it. She it is, that inspires us, when we think aright; she it is, that reproves us, when we do amiss.

O God of Wisdom, preserve us from that false affected wisdom of the world, which counteracts the simplicity of the Gospel; from that profane wisdom, which has banished reason and religion from its circles; from that blind wisdom, which mistakes darkness for light, falsity for truth, evil for good, and good for evil. Preserve

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\* Wisdom c. ix.

us in fine from that senseless wisdom, which is ignorant of the things it ought to know, and learned in the things it ought to know nothing of. None are truly wise, and none are truly enlightened upon earth, but they, who walk by the light of thy eternal Wisdom. We are therefore resolved from this moment to model our conduct by it. We will listen to its dictates, we will follow its maxims. It shall preside at our deliberations, it shall direct our counsels. We will abide by its decisions, we will faithfully and steadily pursue the path it points out to us, that when it has conducted us safe thro' the difficulties and perils of our mortal pilgrimage on earth, it may open to us the bright and everlasting day of a happy eternity. So be it.



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## DICOURSE VIII.

UPON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

*All things are from him, and by him, and in him.*

Rom. c. xi, v. 36.

**I**F there is any one perfection of God, which ought to interest or affect us more than another, it is that of his Providence. For it is by the hand of his bounteous Providence, that we are nourished, supported, and comforted in life; it is in the bosom of his fatherly Providence, that we repose and rest secure. ~~Providence is a divine~~ property, by which God powerfully and sweetly disposes and directs all things to their proper end. For as by his power he created all things in the beginning according to the model, which his Wisdom had adopted from eternity, so by his Providence he now preserves, moves, governs and directs them in the same beautiful order, in which they first began.

This sweet, this sovereign Providence of God is universal. It reaches from end to end; it extends from the highest to the

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lowest

lowest part of the creation ; it watches and presides over every thing, that passes on the earth, or in the waters beneath, or in the heavens above the earth ; it combines the different parts of the universe together ; it regulates and maintains that uniform œconomy, which nature observes in all her works ; it unites in fine that wonderful diversity of natural objects into one great whole, which constitutes the system of the world.

How magnificent, how regular is the order of the heavens ? How wise the arrangement, and how uniform the motion of the stars and planets ? And to what can this wonderful harmony of the heavenly system be attributed, but to that supreme Providence, which has assigned to each planet the sphere, in which it is to move, and to each star the time, at which it is to rise and set. The sun riseth and goeth down, says the Wiseman,\* and returneth to his place, and there rising again maketh his round to the south, till at a fixed and certain

\* Eccl. C. i.

certain point it turneth back towards the north without ever deviating from his track, without ever shortening or protracting his annual course, and without ever refusing his usual light to the earth. The moon, tho' changeable in her aspect, never fails in her attendance upon the earth; nor of all the shining host of heaven is a single star ever seen to break the order, or to wander from the station assigned by Providence. Hearken to these things, says the sacred text,\* stand and consider the wondrous works of God. For none but an infinitely wise and powerful God can enjoin such order, and enforce such obedience from his creatures.

Canst thou, says the Almighty to Job,† command the morning, and show the dawning of the day its place? Hast thou entered into the depth of the sea, and walked into the lowest recesses of the deep? Tell me, if thou knowest, where it is that light dwelleth, and where is the seat of darkness; by what way light is spread and heat di-

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\* Job xxxvii. † C. xxxviii.

vided upon the earth; how the driving storm is directed in its course, and a passage opened to the rolling thunder. Hast thou entered into the storehouses of the snow? Canst thou bring forth the morning star at the stated hour, and make the evening star to rise upon the children of the earth? Canst thou send lightnings, and they will go? Will they return at thy beck, and say to thee, Here we are? ~~X~~How noble, how sublime is this language of the inspired writer? How descriptive of the Providence, that continues to display such wonders in the order of nature, as no human reason can account for?

How admirable again is the alternate vicissitude of day and night? Each day announces its author to the day, that is coming on, says the Psalmist,\* and each night, as it silently glides away, points him out to the night ensuing. How charming is the regular and continual succession of the seasons, that enrich and diversify the year? How wonderful, how beautiful is the multiplicity of flowers, plants and trees, that

\* Psalm xviii.

adorn



adorn the earth, each one distinguished by its own foliage, according to its kind, and producing at the time marked by Providence not only necessaries but even delicacies for the use of man? Warmed by the genial rays of the sun, the earth renews its annual crops and herbage for the nourishment of every animal, that moves upon its surface; or rather it is the hand of Providence, which decks the land with every necessary produce for the support and comfort of human life. Ask the beasts, says holy Job,\* and they will teach thee; ask the birds, and they will tell thee; speak to the earth, and it will answer thee, that in the hand of the Lord is the life of all, that breathes, and that he it is, who giveth food to every living creature.

From the earth let us turn our eyes upon the sea: the prospect is not less striking, nor less convincing are the tokens it exhibits of an all-ruling Providence. For what hand, but that of Providence, could either turn its flowing tide, or smooth its

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\* C. xii.

rolling billows into a calm and even surface? What voice, but that of the Almighty, could make itself be heard by the foaming element, and positively tell it, Thus far shalt thou come, but advance no farther; here thou shalt break thy swelling waves? \* What power, but the sovereign power of God, could restrain its rushing force, which, if left to itself, would overflow the whole earth? The sea then respects the boundary, which Providence has set, and on meeting with a few grains of sand scattered on the shore, it suddenly stops, then hastens back again, fearful as it were of transgressing the command of its Creator.

This is not all. The same Providence, which confines the ocean within its proper limits, makes it likewise subservient to the use and advantage of mankind. The wide extent of sea seems to set one continent at so great a distance from another, as tho' no kind of intercourse had ever been intended to subsist between them. But by the wonderful disposition of divine Providence

\* Job, c. xxxviii.

those very waters serve to open an easy and direct communication between the two extremities of the globe, to pour the riches of one country into the bosom of another, and to unite the most distant people as it were into one society. Whoever attentively considers, will be here forced to acknowledge the wonderful effects of an all-directing Providence, and to cry out, The finger of God undoubtedly is here.\* *h*

Such is the Providence of God in the order of nature. In the order of grace it is still more wonderful. To be convinced of the first, we have but to open our eyes and behold the works of the creation; to ascertain the latter, we must look into ourselves, and consult the feelings of our own heart.

By grace, my Brethren, we are the most noble, the most privileged of his creatures upon earth. We are stamp'd with the image of his divinity, we are endowed with thought and free will, we are destined to be immortal. By means the most ~~sweet and~~

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efficacious

\* Exod. C. viii.

efficacious our gracious God disposes and prepares us for a supernatural state of glory. No human understanding is able to explain the variety, the nature, the force and efficacy of those interior graces, by which he enlightens, animates, invites and draws our souls most powerfully to him, at the same time that he leaves us free. Those salutary reflections, those pious thoughts, those holy desires, those spiritual consolations experienced by some for their encouragement in virtue, and those alarms, those inward troubles, those secret remories felt by others as so many admonitions to repentance; in a word, those inexpressible affections of the soul, and that interior voice of conscience, which speaks so distinctly and so strongly to the hearts of all, what are they, but the voice of our great God, who continually watches over us, and directs our ways? Now if we attentively consider this admirable conduct, which God observes in the direction of his intelligent creatures, and then contemplate the magnificent structure of the heavens, the harmony of nature, and the



the beauteous order of the universe in all its parts, we must necessarily conclude, that a more manifest or more convincing demonstration of the Providence of God cannot possibly be given. Hence in an ecstasy of admiration the royal Prophet exclaims,\* Wonderful, O Lord, is thy knowledge, it is high, and I cannot reach unto it.

~~Amidst such palpable proofs of an all-~~directing Providence, will any one now dare to doubt its existence? Yes, long ago the fool said in his heart, There is no God,§ for he said within himself, that he would sin.† And even in this enlightened age, as it is called, the same senseless language has its abettors, and arguments have been wantonly advanced to justify the blasphemous assertion. Rather then allow the glory due to God, some have foolishly attributed the formation of the world to meer chance, while others with equal extravagance have maintained, that God does not concern himself about the things, which pass therein, and that the actions of weak, imperfect

\* Psalm cxxxviii.

§ Psalm lii.

† Psalm xxxv.

imperfect mortals are too insignificant to deserve the notice of an all-perfect Being. But an all-perfect Being surely cannot be indifferent to his own glory. God cannot with indifference see himself dishonoured and insulted, nor can he suffer his own sacred laws to be trampled on with impunity. If he has left man free in the choice of good and evil, he must in justice punish him for the evil he does, and reward him for the good. For if, as faith and reason teach us, an all-perfect Being actually exists, he must consequently be infinite in every kind of perfection, in power, in wisdom, in goodness and justice. ~~A supreme power, without wisdom, without goodness, and without justice, would be no more than the phantom of a God.~~

God is therefore infinitely just, and he will render to each one according to his works. God is infinitely wise, and he knows what order is. God is infinitely good, and therefore fond of order. God is infinitely powerful, and he preserves order in all his works. The maintenance of  
order

order by fixing and preserving each part of the creation in its respective sphere is the ~~immediate effect of Providence~~. Is it therefore possible for man, who beholds these wonders, seriously to doubt, if Providence exists? No man in his right reason could ever form such a doubt. The swell of passion, the sway of evil habits, the desires of a corrupt heart, may draw expressions from the mouth of the wicked, which cool reason must disown. Elate with pride, and struck with the blindness of a Pharaoh, they may perchance affect to say, as they would wish to believe, that there is no Providence to preside over them, that there is no eye to watch them, no hand to restrain them, no tribunal to call them to account. The fear of offending being thus gradually removed, men will sin without remorse, they will trample on the laws of God, without considering the guilt or apprehending the punishment incurred thereby. Deplorable misfortune!

Yet such is the misfortune, in which thousands of deluded Christians are unhappily

happily involved. Borne away with the torrent of a licentious age, they drive along the broad road with numberless crouds of their own age and rank thoughtless to destruction. Void of principle, void of prudence, and heedless of the order, which God exacts from all his creatures, they enter upon no regular plan of life, but such as whim or the rage of dissipation may adopt for each fleeting day. They seek, they follow no other direction, than that of their own misguided judgment; they engage in pursuits, which yield no true content; they wear out their health and fortune in the labyrinth of delusive enchantments, which leave them as unsatisfied and restless in the end, as they were at first. Unhappy mortals! In the transport of their delusion they cry out to God himself,\* Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him, and what doth it profit us, if we pray to him? They therefore pass their days in the midst  
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\* Job. xxi.



of plenty, and in a moment are hurried down to the grave, into the land of darkness and calamity, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth.\* The just but dreadful punishment of their past irregularities!

How different from this is the conduct of the faithful believer, who takes the sweet disposition of divine Providence for his rule of life? Convinced by faith of the noble end, for which he is made, he carefully employs the means, that are calculated to help him towards it. Whatever objects occur, which tend to draw him from his duty, he lets them pass as dangerous or foreign to his purpose. He disengages his heart from the anxious cares of life, knowing that he has a Father in heaven, who knows his wants, who is both able and willing to assist and comfort him in all his wants. He therefore relies with confidence on his fatherly protection, and <sup>joyfully</sup> ~~sweetly~~ reposes in the arms of his fostering Providence, as in the bosom of a most tender parent.

\* Job x.

parent. If temporal blessings flow in upon him, he receives them with thankfulness, but sets not his heart upon them. If misfortunes happen, he submits with patience; he still adores the power, which permits or sends them for his trial, being well assured, that thro' whatever ways God is pleased to lead him, he has nothing else than his final happiness in view.

O God, how pleasing how <sup>delightful</sup> comforting is it, to unfold the nature and to consider at leisure the characteristic qualities of thy adorable Providence? A Providence infinitely holy in its counsels, and infinitely amiable in its operations; ~~for having the~~ secret springs of action and the efficacy of second causes at its disposal, it sweetly and effectually brings all things to their appointed ends. A Providence infinitely powerful in its decrees, whenever it chuses to exert its empire; ~~for far from being~~ baffled by resistance, it often turns the greatest obstacles into instruments conducive to its designs. A Providence infinitely certain in the attainment of its ends, and that

that oftentimes by means the most opposite to our feeble views. A Providence infinitely compassionate; for it administers comfort to all, who labour and are burdened with affliction. A Providence infinitely bountiful in bestowing the common blessings of life with an impartial hand upon the good and bad, upon the just and unjust. A Providence in fine every way paternal in its affections towards the children of men; for it liberally and gratuitously distributes gifts to them all, according to the difference of rank and station, that each one holds in the community.

But why is this difference of rank and station, you will ask? Why, in the general society of mankind are some great and others little? Why are some rich and others poor? Why do some abound with superfluous wealth, while others pine with want and distress? Why amongst children of the same father is this distinction of fortune? X For the maintenance of human society, replies Providence. In the world there are the little and the great, there

there are the rich and the needy, they, who roll in shining affluence, and they, who toil for a decent competence; and if it were not so, there would be no subordination, no dependence, no bond of union, no order, no civil life, no relative connexion between citizen and citizen. Yes, it is this inequality of rank, this difference of condition, that knits the bonds of society together: by this individuals are made sensible of the need they have of aid and support from each other. The sense of mutual preservation first drew them together, and without a due subordination among themselves their union could not last. In vain would the head command, if there were not hands and feet to obey: the hands and feet by obeying contribute no less to their own support, than to the support of the head. Without such a variety of functions, and without a mutual harmony and subordination among the members, the body itself would soon perish. For the peace and preservation therefore of the great family of mankind, divine Providence



vidence has established different ranks and degrees amongst them, without which all would be anarchy and confusion. Consequently whoever wishes to disturb the order established by God amongst his children, wishes evil to himself. *flies in the face of*

~~Yet such evil wishes are suffered not~~ *his Providence*  
only to lurk in the hearts of men, but even frequently to burst forth into crimes the most outrageous. For tho' our blessed Lord has denounced woe to the world by reason of its scandals,\* yet in the world many scandals necessarily happen. Our heavenly Father sees and permits them; and it is in this very permission, that his Providence appears so wonderful. Every thing in the world, sin excepted, is the effect of his unerring Providence; sin alone cannot be his work. But the permission of sin is not incompatible with the more elevated views of his universal Providence. For tho' he has commanded us to serve him, he has left the execution of his commands to our determination. Having thus endowed

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\* Mat. xviii.

us with free will, he respects the privileges he has granted us. He invites, he commands us to serve him, but compels us not. Sinners often abuse this kind indulgence of their God, and frequent scandals consequently ensue. But God, according to the general laws he has established, suffers those scandals for a time, and lets them go seemingly unpunished. He suffers sinners to partake with his saints in the common benefits of life. He permits a mixture of good and evil amongst his creatures, he lets the wheat and cockle grow in the same field together,\* he nourishes both with the same rain and sunshine 'till harvest time. For he rather chuses to draw good out of evil, says St. Austin, than not suffer evil to exist.

We live in the midst of a profane world, where the incredulity of a false Philosophy decries the awful mysteries of religion on one hand, and on the other an unbridled licentiousness of manners ridicules the observance of its sacred laws; where the daring unbeliever

\* Mat. xiii.

unbeliever is careſſed, and the faithful ſervant of Jeſus Chriſt is diſcarded; where we have ſeen the ancient nurſeries of piety and learning overthrown, and religion itſelf oppreſſed and plundered by the very powers, that Providence had once choſen for its protection; ~~where from the very pre-~~ cincts of the ſanctuary we hear new ſyſtems ſtarted, that tend to ſcandalize the flock of Chriſt by their temporizing principles and hazarded aſſertions, by which the faithful are expoſed to the danger of being either ſhaken in their faith, or ſeduced from the primitive diſcipline of their forefathers. But, my Brethren, why have the ungodly thus deviſed vain things, why have they riſen up, and conſpired againſt the Lord and againſt his Chriſt? Is it to appear unfettered in their opinions of religion? Is it to counteract the deſigns of Providence? Is it to arraign the wiſdom of the Saints, or to enjoy the malignant ſatisfaction of having diſturbed the peaceful union of their brethren? Behold he, that dwelleth

~~dwelleth in heaven, shall laugh at them,  
and confound them in his anger.\*~~

If by an abuse of power or of talents received, <sup>men</sup> ~~sinners~~ chuse to transgress the laws, which God has appointed for their observance, they will find in the end, that he has in reserve a superior law, by which he forcibly draws them back to the order he has established. ~~For there is an established~~ order of grace and mercy for the reward of virtue, and there is an order of justice and control for the punishment of vice. By refusing to co-operate with the designs of his saving mercy, men incur the wrath of his avenging justice; and by spurning at the yoke, which the mild and peaceful spirit of the Gospel imposes on them, they necessarily fall under the galling tyranny of their own passions, which if not subdued in time, must be heavily chastised for eternity. Thus has God comprised all things within the empire of his irresistible Providence, so that nothing in nature can frustrate his fixed design of making all subservient to his own eternal glory.

Sinners

\* Psalm ii.



Sinners are not aware, that by their criminal excesses they accelerate their own punishment. They are permitted to shine like baleful comets for awhile, till they complete the measure of their crimes. Heavy judgment awaits them at the close of their career. The longer an offended God seems to dissemble the sins of men, the greater, we may be sure, is his preparation, either of mercy towards his elect, or of punishment upon his enemies. Far from presuming to search into the secrets of divine Providence, let us adore in silence its decrees, and under all the appointments of heaven let us humbly wait the issue of its designs.

To a Christian in affliction nothing can afford such grounds of comfort, as a firm belief accompanied with a filial trust in the Providence of God. God is our Father, and he loves us. God is our protector, and he knows what is best for us ; he permits no temporal calamity to befall us, but what we may turn, as he mercifully intends it, to our greater good. If by

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sufferings he is pleased to try the virtue of his faithful servants, it is, because their services are acceptable to him. Because thou wert acceptable to God, said the Angel to Tobias,\* it was necessary, that temptations should prove thee. Thus has the patience of Job been ascertained; thus Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and a thousand others have been tried, and their trials are recorded in holy writ, as standing monuments of that special Providence, which presides over the Elect, and protects them in all their troubles. For if God at any time is pleased to try the fidelity of his friends, he also supports them in their trials. If he afflicts them, he likewise comforts them in their afflictions; ~~or if he exposes them to conflicts, it is to crown their virtues and to reward their victories in the end, which he enables them to win.~~

In all our wants, in all our sufferings, on every occasion and in every difficult circumstance of life it is a comfort, it is a happiness to know, that God is our fatherly protector.

protector. For if he so clothes the lilies of the field, and so feeds the birds of the air, that not one of them falls to the ground without his notice, how much more tender must be his care for his intelligent creatures? ~~From the highest heavens to the~~ lowermost depths of the earth, from the most noble to the most imperceptible of his works he stretches forth his provident hand, and sweetly but powerfully directs them all to their respective ends for the manifestation of his own adorable perfections.

The ways of his Providence indeed are often dark and inexplicable to our narrow understandings. The good and virtuous often are oppressed, while the proud and wicked smile in prosperity. Why he has so ordained, it matters little for the Christian to know any further, than that it is for their good. Our pilgrimage on earth, we know is but of short duration. It is no more than a transient exercise of our patience, a temporary trial of our faith, a meritorious preparation for a future state, which

shall have no end. To give sinners a just horror of their crimes, and an opportunity of atoning for their guilt, he condescends to visit them also with temporal afflictions. Had they without warning been untimely cut off, as their sins deserved, they had long since dwelt in everlasting flames.

By passing humiliations, therefore, kind Providence disposes sinners to repentance; by worldly disappointments it draws them from their sinful pursuits; by temporal chastisements it admonishes them of pains, that shall never end. With reason then may the penitent sinner cry out with holy David,\* It is good for me, O Lord, that thou hast humbled me. When the measure of our mortal life shall be run out, and the day of eternity shall dawn upon us, the veil of darkness will be then drawn from our eyes, and the glory of divine Providence shall shine forth in full splendour. We shall then know and confess, we shall then praise and adore, we shall clearly see, with what wisdom, with what efficacy and sweet-

ness

\* Psalm cxviii.



~~ness~~ God has made all things finally concur no less to his own glory, than to the happiness of his Elect.

~~Great God, we humbly adore the sweet~~ dispositions of thy universal Providence over the children of men. For in thy hands are the means and end, the beginning and progress, the event and consequence of every individual thing, that happens in the order of nature and of grace. From eternity thou hast foreseen all, that could possibly exist; thou hast arranged all, and thou actually directest all, that now exists, for the general good and benefit of mankind. Thousands of times have we experienced the effects of <sup>his</sup> ~~thy~~ special Providence; nor is there a day, or even a single instant of our lives, in which ~~thy~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~bounteous Providence~~ does not visibly appear. Yes, Lord, thy bounteous Providence feeds and clothes us by the creatures thou hast made for our use: it refreshes us by the air we breathe, and enlightens us by the sun we see. Thou therefore art our strong support, our strength and comfort

on all occasions. O grant we may never be either undeserving of thy goodness towards us, or forgetful of our dependence on thee. Thro' thy grace we will ever praise thee in all thy works, we will behold thee in all thy creatures, we will call upon thee in all our wants, we will serve thee in all our works. Such at least is the present purpose of our hearts; we will do our utmost to serve thee well. Aid us then, good Lord, by thy holy grace to do what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt.

## DISCOURSE IX.

UPON THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

*How good is God! Psalm lxxii.*

GOODNESS is a perfection so essential to God, that it seems to form, as it were, his distinguished character, and to constitute his whole nature. Such at least is the idea we form, and such are the effects we daily experience of the divine Goodness towards us, that we are naturally induced to think and to speak no otherwise of God, than of a Being infinitely good and bountiful. Bounty seems to be his darling property, since to be with the sons of men, and to pour his blessings on them is his express delight.\* When we behold the wonderful works of the creation, we admire and adore the power, that wrought them: but when we reflect, that God in his goodness has made these wonderful works of his omnipotence subservient to our use and happiness, we admire still more; we adore and praise. The inspired writers,

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\* Prov. viii.

eager to communicate the lofty sentiments they entertained of God's adorable perfection, magnify him with titles the most expressive of his supreme excellence. They stile him the most High, the Wonderful, the Strong, the Lord of Hosts, the Lord God of Powers. But the title, which seems the most expressive of his excellence, is that of the Good and Bountiful.

The Bounty of God considered in itself is a natural inclination and propensity of will to communicate himself to his creatures, and to do them good by showering down his blessings on them. Now as the divine essence is infinite in perfection, God is naturally inclined to communicate himself to his creatures, were they capable, in an infinite degree. But since the condition of our nature is too limited for such a communication, God in the effusions of his goodness towards us proportions the measure of his gifts to our capacity, and pours them out according to our respective wants and exigencies.

From this inexhaustible fund of goodness  
in



in God, springs his ineffable love for man. His love manifests itself in one continued flow of blessings, which he imparts to man, and which man by virtue of the same love gives back to him again, as to their first origin and last end. For as the love, which proceeds from God, descends and expands itself upon his creatures, so it likewise returns, and draws the heart of his creatures back to God, the eternal fountain, from whence all goodness flows. Thus by the laws of reciprocal love, the same motive, which inclines the God of goodness to stoop to man, lifts the heart of man to God. And in this sense it is, that the love of God is called an extatic love ; because it transports and carries the person, who loves, to the immediate object of his love ; the effect of which is an affectionate-union of God with man, and of man with God. But in this we must carefully observe, that God is always the first and principal mover, without whose aid we cannot advance even the least step towards him. By a gratuitous act of goodness God first enlightens the mind and

excites the affection of our soul ; the soul by an act of her free will then consents, and follows the sweet attractive of divine grace ; and thus by an union of love cleaves to God, the center of her happiness.

The sun exhibits a strong resemblance of the effects produced by this reciprocal love, which passes between God and a devout soul. The sun is the great principle of natural light and heat : it sheds its benign influence upon the vegetative part of the creation, which it warms and animates: it refines the vapours of the earth, it dilates and rarifies them with its rays as it draws them up, till they at last dissolve and mingle with the purest light of heaven. So it is in a spiritual sense with respect to the love of God. God, the source of all good, imparts his heavenly light to a faithful soul, and kindles in her the fire of his holy love. Being warmed by the sacred flame, the soul then glows with zeal in the divine service ; she becomes more elevated in her sentiments of Christian perfection ; she no longer rests in the enjoyment of worldly ob-  
jects

jects, but being by degrees disengaged from all terrene affections and desires, she soars in thought to God, earnestly wishing to be dissolved, that she may see and enjoy him face to face in the kingdom of his glory.

That we may acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of this bounteous will of God in the love he bears us, let us consider it in the five following points of view. In the first place let us consider the sovereign majesty of Him, who loves; secondly the lowly condition of those he loves; thirdly the signal benefits, that accompany his love; fourthly the special manner, in which he testifies his love; fifthly the motive and the end, for which he loves.

1st. Let us consider who it is, that loves us. It is God himself: it is a God of infinite majesty, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, who loves, and even caresses us with his love. He has loved us from eternity. Before we had a being, he cast an eye of predilection upon us, by a special act of benevolence he singled us out and drew us into life, as the objects of his

affection. What an honour, what happiness, my Brethren, to have been thus distinguished by a God infinitely wise and holy ! How high ought to be our esteem of so singular a favour, how active our endeavours to deserve, and how attentive our care to preserve it ?

In the palaces of earthly kings eager and jealous is the strife of courtiers to gain the good graces of their prince. Every attention is paid, and every opportunity watched to obtain the royal bounty, not only on account of the honour, but of the advantages also, that attend it. Now if the good will of an earthly king, who is but a man equally mortal as ourselves, is so much coveted and sought after, how zealous, how watchful ought we always to be in soliciting the grace and friendship of Almighty God ? For as much as the heavens are elevated above the earth, or as much as eternal goods surpass the toys of temporal enjoyments, so much is the majesty of God exalted above all earthly greatness, and so much does his love excel whatever is  
thought



thought most valuable and precious in the world.

2dly. But who are these darling objects, whom so great a God has thus deigned to love? Are they the immortal Princes of his kingdom, the bright partakers of his glory, the pure and incorporeal Spirits of his heavenly court, whose only employment is to adore, to love and praise his sovereign greatness? No: they are the weak, the poor, the imperfect mortals of this lower world. They are men born in sin, clothed with infirmity, and prone to evil from their very youth: men generally full of themselves, proud and vain in their own conceits, often forgetful of the obligations they owe to their bountiful Creator, and repaying his goodness with ingratitude, with indifference and neglect. These are they, whom an all-perfect God embraces with the kindest love, and enriches with his choicest blessings. What goodness! What bounty! Should we see a subject of mean condition raised by his sovereign from a state the most abject to dignities

ties and honours, how envied would be his fortune? But what are the dignities and honours of this base world in comparison of those sublime, those heavenly and eternal honours, which God has in store for his chosen favourite man. Great God, what is man, exclaims holy Job,\* that thou shouldst magnify him? Or why doest thou set thy heart upon him?

3dly. Notwithstanding the natural imperfection of man's state on earth, God has been pleased to destine him for a state of supernatural glory in heaven; a state, to which by nature he had no title, and of which without a special revelation he could have no conception. For little had it been in the estimate of supreme goodness to give us only earthly goods, and inadequate had it been to the great design he had formed of making us completely happy, to confine our hopes of happiness to the fleeting enjoyment of a few years, or to the transient objects of a vain delusive world. Therefore in the world to come God has prepared for us  
such

\* C. vii.

such joys, such glory, and such transcendent bliss, as no mortal eye has seen, and no heart of man can conceive : \* a bliss proportioned to the bounteous liberality of a God, desirous to reward the faithful services of his friends ; an incomprehensible bliss, which in duration is equal to the eternity of God himself.

Such is the happiness, which God has prepared for those, who love him ; and that we might be induced to love him with all the powers of our soul, innumerable other gifts and favours he has bestowed upon us. From the midst of darkness he has called us into his admirable light ; in the bosom of his Church he has nourished us with the doctrine of his Apostles ; from our earliest youth he has provided for our instruction in the ways of salvation ; he has made known his promises to us, and raised our hope into a lively expectation of being eternally united to him in his glory. These and every other blessing, which we enjoy in life, flow from no other source, than that of the  
divine

\* 1. Cor. ii.

divine bounty. Yes, my Brethren, all we behold around us in the vast creation, all we possess and all we hope for, are the gracious gifts of God, who has ordained not only the light of heaven and the whole produce of the earth, but the Angels also themselves, those bright and domestic Princes of his heavenly court, to serve us. For he hath given his Angels charge over thee, says the royal Prophet,\* to guard thee in all thy ways ; in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest by chance thou strike thy foot against a stone. These precious gifts he has bestowed to help us on in our way to heaven, and upon our entrance there, he will bestow himself to reward our past labours with the plenitude of endless glory: so that infinite as the Almighty is in riches and in goodness, he can extend his liberality no farther in our favour, since he has nothing greater than himself to give.

Let us now cast an eye upon those glittering and passing vanities, which the world offers to its deluded followers, and compare

\* Psalm xc.



pare them with the solid and lasting goods, which a God of infinite goodness has prepared for his friends in the life to come. How light, how contemptible do they appear in the comparison! Yet such as they are, these are the vanities, which thousands and thousands incessantly toil after in preference to the joys of heaven. Ye sons of men,\* how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanities and seek after deceit? Lift up your eyes, and by the help of divine faith contemplate those immense, those eternal joys, which your heavenly father has treasured up for the reward of your virtues.

4thly. Let us next consider the fond and affectionate manner, in which this God of goodness is pleased to express his love for us. For he loves us, not simply as a king loves his subjects, nor as a master loves his faithful servants, nor even as one friend loves another, but he loves us, as the most affectionate of fathers loves his dearest children. How fond, how watchful, how tender

\* Psalm iv.

tender is such a parent's love? Can a mother possibly forget her own child, can she ever forget to love or cease to cherish the offspring of her womb, says the Prophet Isaiah? \* Such a forgetfulness indeed is scarce possible in nature; and tho' it were, yet I never will forget thee, says the Almighty, for behold I have graven thee in my hands. Wherefore give praise, O ye heavens, and rejoice, O earth; ye mountains give praise with jubilation, because the Lord hath comforted his people: For we have not again received the spirit of bondage in fear, † like the Jews of old but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we are qualified to call God our Father. Our Father, who art in heaven, is the form of addressing God in prayer, as it is taught us by Christ himself.

Under the ancient law God governed his people by the terrifying strokes, of omnipotence, and awed them into their duty by fear: but in the law of adoption he draws us to his service by the sweet attractives  
of

\* C. xlix.      † Röm. viii.

of divine love. They were his servants, we are his sons; and if sons, we are of course his heirs, heirs to the riches of his glory, and entitled to the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom thro' Christ Jesus his Son our Redeemer. For we are joint heirs with Christ to the crown of immortality, which he has purchased for us by his blood.

Behold then in how singular a manner the Father has loved us, says St. John.\* He has loved us to such excess, as to give us his only begotten Son for our Redeemer, by which he makes us his sons in name and in effect. My dearest beloved, continues the same Apostle, we now are the sons of God; it is not yet manifest, what we shall be, or to what pitch of supereminent glory he will raise us: but this we know, that the moment he reveals himself in full splendour to us, we shall be like unto him. For we shall see him as he is; we shall then be associated with him in the participation of a boundless and incomprehensible felicity. What a profusion, what excess of love is this

\* 1 Epist. ii.

this in the Creator towards his creatures! It is a love, it is a goodness, which none but God can express or even comprehend.

5thly. Let us then in the last place consider the motive and the end, which God has in view by so loving us, as he does. No increase of personal happiness, no prospect of any greater extent of power or dominion can possibly enter into the views of divine omnipotence. Being infinitely happy within himself, and essentially possessed of every quality, that constitutes unlimited perfection, he can derive no personal benefit from poor and helpless creatures, who have nothing, who can acquire nothing independently of the divine bounty. The love therefore, which God bears us, is a gratuitous love, and has for its object our advantage and our happiness: that is to say, Almighty God dives into the immensity of his own infinite perfections, and from his goodness alone derives the pure motive of his love for man.

Hence that universal providence, which he extends to all his creatures; hence that  
tender



tender care, which, without exception of persons, he shows to all mankind; hence that liberal profusion of his gifts, which, without distinction of times and places, he showers down upon the whole earth. He opens his hand, says the royal Prophet,\* and fills every living creature with benediction; and notwithstanding the ingratitude he often meets with in return, he continues still to give, as tho' he had hitherto given nothing. For neither his goodness, nor his treasure is any way lessened by the favours he bestows. The one is as inexhaustible as the other. Of all the sons of men he remembers there is not one, whom he has not made, so neither is there one, whom he does not tenderly embrace.

Even the very sinner, notwithstanding the grievousness of his guilt, has a share in his fatherly mercies. Whether seduced by the tempting offers of a false world, or softened by the allurements of corrupt nature, he chance to stray from the path of virtue, God never ceases to check him by remorse,

\* Psalm cxliv.

remorse, to restrain him by the fear of his terrible judgments, to rouse his faith with the thought of repentance, and to animate his hope with the offer of forgiveness. His hand is always stretched out to save his falling child from destruction. Yes, Lord, thou offerest him thy grace, and while he is bent upon indulging his unruly passions to his own ruin and thy dishonour, thou still entertainest thoughts of peace and compassion for him. Whole years have passed since he went astray, thou hast patiently waited for his return, by repeated strokes of affliction thou hast admonished him of thy justice; by visiting the companions of his irregularities with an untimely death thou hast warned him of his own danger, but hast yet suspended the thunderbolt of wrath, in expectation of winning him back by goodness into thy embraces.

The goodness of God, my Brethren, is therefore that of a loving Father, ever watching and ever providing for the welfare of his darling offspring. Men often

vary with times and circumstances : they form or break the tie of their connexions, as it may suit their interest or their humour. Upon the many, who profess themselves friends, little reliance is to be had on the reverse of fortune. The man in disgrace is commonly left to grieve and lament alone. God never varies ; steady and unchangeable in his goodness, he has his eyes always fixed upon those of an upright heart, says David,\* and his ears are always open to their petition. For he loves those, who love him, and he loves them to the end. § I once was young, says the Psalmist, † I am now grown old ; but during my whole life I have never seen the upright man forsaken by the Lord. For the Lord cherishes his faithful servants, and preserves them as the apple of his eye.

How comes it then, that we so often see them labouring under a load of afflictions ? Let us open the holy Scriptures, and we shall know. Let us call to mind the suffering lives of Jesus Christ, of his Apostles

\* Psalm xxxiii.

§ John xiii.

† xxxvi.

Apostles and blessed Martyrs, and our enquiries will be satisfied. To perfect their virtue, to enhance their merit, and augment their glory our heavenly Father frequently chastises whom he loves most tenderly, and if he loves, he will not fail to console them in their sufferings. Could we but disclose those secret comforts, which the holy Spirit diffuses in their hearts, we should find them possessed of a peace, which the pampered worldling is a stranger to. Tho' their senses feel the external pain, as feel they must, yet in their patience, in the testimony of a good conscience and an humble submission to the divine will, they interiorly possess their souls.\* They know, that the day of trial soon will end, that their sorrows will be turned into joy, that the light and momentary tribulations of this life patiently borne will entitle them to a crown of glory immense and infinite. Hence a constant flow of inward peace is even now their portion, which no external sufferings can take away.

Love

\* Luke xxi.



Love, gratitude and zeal is the fruit we are to draw from this consideration.

To love God with our whole heart is his express command, and the motive alledged by the beloved Apostle \* for our complying with it, is, because God has first loved us. Nothing so common as to say, we love God, but the affection of our hearts, and the tenour of our actions seldom perfectly accord with the language of our lips. My dearest children, says the same Apostle, † let us love not by the tongue or in word only, but in deed and in truth. For this purpose our love must proceed from a sincere heart; it must be a dutiful and an active love. This God justly challenges even for his own sake, as in himself he unites every charm and every attractive capable of engaging our love. Beauty, power, wisdom, goodness, and every other perfection in an infinite degree are his essential attributes. Let us therefore love this God of infinite perfection with all our soul; by the daily exercises of a virtuous

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life,

\* 1 John iv.

† c. iii.

life, as well as by the purest affection of our hearts, let us honour and obey him in all things. This gratitude requires. To the bounty of God we are indebted for all we possess in the order either of grace or nature: he expects, he has a right to our grateful homage in return. Yet how often and how culpably have we disputed him his right? Instead of paying him due honour for his benefits bestowed upon us, how criminally have we turned those very benefits to his dishonour by making them subservient to our own perverse ends? Were the goodness or the patience of almighty God less than infinite, such monstrous ingratitude must have long since stopped the flow of grace, and drawn upon us the heavy punishment our guilt deserved. Let us then animate our piety at the thought of those many and inestimable favours we have received from the divine goodness, and the more deficient we hitherto have been in our acts of thanksgiving for them, the more earnestly let us try to atone for our neglect by a generous, by a constant,  
and

and unwearied zeal in God's service for the future. For if we entertain a due sense of the unlimited bounty and liberality of God, we shall naturally be zealous for his glory.

By inclination, by affection and interest we are strongly attached to those, from whom we have received or hope to receive great things. Is such the disposition of our hearts with respect to God? Are we attached to his service, are we zealous for his honour, are we desirous of his being more perfectly known, loved, and adored? Are we grieved to see his goodness abused, his authority insulted, and his sanctity profaned by a wicked world? Do we rejoice to see him honoured by his more faithful servants? Do we co-operate with him in the work of our own salvation, do we lend our aid to such undertakings, as tend to promote his glory? Or rather are not our thoughts in general turned upon useless projects, or lulled by sloth into a culpable indifference for every thing, that regards his holy service? Such were not the sentiments of his Saints, such was not the

tice of those, who served their God with a generous and sincere heart.

Animated by the principle of religion, they vigorously exerted themselves in a steady performance of their Christian duties: by the exercises whether of an active or of a contemplative life they sought the greater glory of God in all things; they thought their best exertions were but little in comparison of what they owed to his divine bounty. An ardent zeal for his honour burnt like a pure flame within their breasts, and urged them on to the most arduous undertakings. This was the zeal which bore them up amidst the difficulties they met with, and pushed them on to acts of heroic virtue. This was the zeal, which made them steady in the works of piety, fervent in devotion, patient in affliction, indefatigable in labour, unshaken in persecution, charitable, humane, and benevolent to all. This was the zeal, which carried the Apostles and their successors in the ministry beyond the limits of the civilized world to plant the doctrine of Christianity among



among barbarous nations in climes, which the most enterprising warriors could never reach. This in fine is the zeal, which animates thousands and thousands of perfect Christians in the practice of every moral and religious duty; whose spirit is no other, than that of the Gospel, and whose sole ambition is worthily to serve the God, who made them.

Shall not such examples warm us? Shall not such zeal kindle some sparks at least of the like holy ardour within our breasts? We profess the same faith with them, we are engaged in the same service, we have the same promises for our encouragement, we expect the same heaven for our reward. With an effusion of love God says to each one of us, Son, give me thy heart.\* He demands no more. Can we think of dividing our heart between God and his creatures? Upon a thousand titles God claims the whole. Supremely happy within himself, and standing in need of nothing out of himself, from the bosom of his

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eternal

\* Prov. xxiii.

eternal goodness he has drawn innumerable Beings into life, capable of knowing, of loving and possessing him for ever. By a special decree he has been pleased to single us out preferably to millions, who shall never partake of that happy privilege. Yes, dear Christians, such has been the impulse of God's singular love for us, that bursting, as it were, from the center of its own immensity, it has expanded itself in the formation of our souls in particular, which it has stamped with the image of his likeness, and endowed with a capacity of sharing his glory.

What earthly king ever thought of raising a subject to the state of royalty with himself, and of making him his partner in the same throne? But should any potent monarch thus distinguish some chosen favourite, it would be no more than the act of a mortal man, bestowing transient honours on a mortal like himself. God has done infinitely more for us. He has descended from heaven for the sake of raising us poor helpless mortals from the earth,

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he has adopted us into a participation of his kingdom, he has made us his heirs, and the co-heirs of Christ his only son in the crown of immortality.

Great God, how ineffable is this thy goodness, how wonderful thy love! Thou hast created us with no other design, than to make us happy with thyself. Thou hast enlightened our minds to know thee, thou hast moved our wills to love thee, thou hast dilated our hearts to receive thee, thou hast cleansed and sanctified our souls to possess thee. O Lord, thou art the God of our salvation: thou inspirest us with holy desires, that we may seek thee; thou helpest our endeavours, that we may serve thee; thou directest our steps, that we may find thee; and when we have the happiness to find, it is then thou teachest, how sweet thy service is to those, who love thee.

O God of charity, for charity thou art, inflame our hearts with the fire of thy divine love; kindle in our breasts that sacred glow, that ardent zeal for thy service,

which animated the piety of thy most faithful servants. Infuse thy holy Spirit into our souls, that henceforward we may breathe only after thee, that we may wholly live for thee and in thee, that our sole occupation, study and desire may be to please, to honour and glorify thee in all we do. O let no terrene affections, no base suggestions of flesh and blood ever tempt us from thy service. Change every sinful delight into disgust, and make every temporal affliction, suffered for thy sake, salutary and welcome to our souls. Let it be our comfort to think, that whatever thou ordainest is the most conducive to our eternal good; let thy will be done in all things. By an entire conformity of our wills with thine we desire to be united to thee both in life and in death. Pure is the joy, which results from such an union. Thou art our God, our portion and inheritance for ever.

O God, the supreme and uncreated principle of all good, we love thee with our whole hearts. From this moment we devote ourselves to thy service, and we  
earnestly



earnestly desire to love and serve thee to the full extent our weakness is capable of. Many favours have we requested of thee, many more have we received : but there is one, which we now most humbly crave in preference to all others ; it is the grace of thy holy love. Yes, Lord, it is what we earnestly ask, it is what from thy fatherly goodness we most firmly hope to receive. Give us then the grace to love thee, and to love thee with all the powers of our soul ; to love thee above all things created, to love thee purely for thyself, and to love thee to our latest breath, that when this mortal life shall end, we may then begin to love thee with greater perfection and with greater ardour for evermore.

## DISCOURSE X.

UPON THE MERCY OF GOD.

*How great is the Mercy of the Lord!*

Ecclesiast. c. xvii, v. 28.

**T**HE Bounty of God extends its influence to all men in general; his Mercy shows itself to the afflicted and to sinners in particular. The afflicted by unfolding their wants in humble prayer before the throne of mercy receive comfort in due season, and sinners by repentance obtain forgiveness of their sins. Mercy in God is therefore an infinite perfection, by virtue of which he compassionates the miseries of man, and is moved to relieve them.

To define the essence, or to demonstrate the innate qualities of divine Mercy, it would be necessary to dive into the heart of God, and explore the boundless depth of his divine counsels. But since to human understanding that is a thing impossible, we must be content to trace it, as far as our weak abilities can reach, in its external operations. The wonders it  
has

has wrought, and the effects it has produced in favour of mankind, may enable us to form some faint idea of the incomprehensible perfection it contains. The depth of misery, into which the whole human race was plunged by the unfortunate transgression of our first parents, when duly considered, must convince us of the infinite mercy, that has been displayed in drawing us from a state of spiritual darkness into light, from the death of sin into a life of grace, from the deplorable condition of being children of wrath into the happy lot of becoming the adoptive sons of God, and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. Upon this foundation is raised the glorious fabrick of a religion, which God in his mercy has revealed for our sanctification and happiness in this life as well the next.

Behold, says St. John,\* what excessive kindness the Father has expressed for us. He has given us a title not only to the name, but also to the privileges of the

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sons

\* 1 Ep. c. iii.

sons of God. This, my Brethren, is a dignity so great, and a favour so inconceivable, that an infidel world stands astonished, and knows not how to give credit to it. My dearly beloved, continues the Apostle, we are now the sons of God, and by this is manifested the immense charity of our divine Redeemer, since for our sake he has laid down his life, and has washed us clean from sin by the effusion of his own most precious blood. In his divine nature God was incapable either of suffering or of dying; he was therefore pleased to assume human nature, that he might be capable of both. Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou wert not satisfied with, says the Psalmist,\* in the name of our Saviour Christ, then said I, behold I come. I have proclaimed thy justice before the great assembly of nations; thy tender mercies I have not concealed; O Lord thou knowest it, I have made manifest thy truth, and thy salvation. That we may therefore form a just estimate of the

\* Psalm xxxix.



the great mercy God has shown us, let us consider it under the different points of view, as it shines forth to us.

The most sublime, the most excellent, and most wonderful work of divine mercy is the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God. This divine mystery is at once the grand object of our faith and the foundation of all our hope. To draw us out of the abyss of sin, and to redeem our souls from hell God became man.\* A God omnipotent, eternal and immense, became incarnate in the womb of a pure virgin,§ was born in the form of a suffering infant, and dwelt amongst us. From the throne of his heavenly glory he beheld mankind miserably fallen from their first state, stript of their inheritance, and groaning under the sentence of reprobation, till full satisfaction should be made to the divine justice. Nothing, that man could do, was equal to the satisfaction required. Touched with compassion at our miseries, to which after thousands of years there was otherwise  
to

\* John c. i.

§ Luke i.

be no end, the eternal Word descended from heaven, and put on weak mortality, becoming like to us in all things excepting sin.\* The uncreated and only begotten Son of the Father, the image of his substance and the splendour of his glory, voluntarily offered and submitted himself to death, the painful, the ignominious death of the cross. What condescension, what mercy, what love! To redeem a slave the king of men and Angels laid down his life in agony and bitter torments. Yes, God himself in the second person of the most adorable Trinity came to seek and to recover that, which was lost. In the form of suffering man he charged himself with our infirmities, he shared with us in our griefs and pains, that from him we may learn, how to merit by them. By his own footsteps he has smoothed the rugged path of virtue to his followers, and for our encouragement is he also risen from the dead. What Christian, when he beholds Jesus Christ with a heavy cross upon

his

\* Heb. iv.

his shoulders and a crown of thorns upon his head leading the way before him, will dare to complain of his own lighter burden; or, when he sees him rising in triumph from the grave, will not eagerly strive to partake of the same glory?

The second effect of the divine mercy towards us is the doctrine, by which our blessed Redeemer has instructed and reformed mankind. For he is the true light,\* which enlightens every man, that comes into the world. Before the day of salvation dawned, the whole world lay buried in the darkness of infidelity; it was overrun with errors, that disgraced human reason, and was habituated to crimes the most shameful and abominable. Blinded in their understanding, and wounded in all the faculties of their soul by sin, which they inherited from their first parents, men were grown ignorant of the most essential duties of religion, they had forgot the Lord, who made them,§ they had lost sight of their last end, they neither respected the  
immortality

\* John c. i.

§ Psalm cv.

immortality of their souls, nor distinguished between the amiableness of virtue and the deformity of vice. In defiance of the supreme Being they had framed to themselves Gods of creatures, and adored the work of their own hands. Some paid homage to the sun, moon, and stars, others to brute beasts, to plants and creeping insects of the earth, while others in the wild transports of superstitious phrensy sacrificed their very sons and daughters to the devils,\* or to gods, they did not know.

At length after a period of near four thousand years the Sun of Justice, the God of truth rose from on high, and those monsters of impiety, those fiends of darkness, fled at his approach. By the light of his divine doctrine he dispelled the clouds of infidelity, cleared away the gloomy horrors of idolatry, and spread the gladdening beams of salvation over all the earth. That there is but one God, by whom all things are made, and without whom there is nothing, which has been made; that he presides

\* Psalm cv.



presides over all, moves all, and governs all with infinite wisdom; that in the same divine nature there are three Persons really distinct, the Father, Son, and holy Ghost, consubstantial and equal in all perfection; that our souls are immortal, destined to subsist in a future state of endless happiness or of endless misery, according to the choice we make of a virtuous or a wicked life; that the heavens we behold, and the earth we live on, shall at length pass away; that at the last day we shall all rise, be judged, and receive sentence according to our works, are the sublime and eternal truths, in which Jesus Christ has instructed the heathen world at a time it seemed the least deserving of so bright a mercy. By a singular providence we, my Brethren, have been made partakers of that mercy, and unpardonable will be our guilt, if we neglect to improve it to our eternal good.

A third effect of the divine Mercy is exhibited to us in the model, which Jesus Christ has given of all perfect virtues. The sublimity of his doctrine he accompanied

panied with works of the purest sanctity, and thus by example as well as by words he has trained his followers to the knowledge and practice of true religion. Before the coming of our blessed Saviour, men were little versed in the knowledge and exercise of real virtue. A tincture of vice was often visible even in their most shining actions. Ambition, avarice, dissention, hatred, lust, and every other vice, which without a check from religion had either self-love or some inordinate desire of the heart for its incentive, swayed the manners of mankind. A God incarnate came, and with him came a train of smiling virtues in their brightest charms; humility, patience, meekness, piety, purity of body and mind, charity, benevolence. Nor is there in effect any kind of virtue, that adorns either an active or contemplative life, of which our blessed Lord has not given us a most perfect model. Drawn by the attractives of so divine a light, thousands and thousands of every age and climate have turned their backs upon the  
offers

offers of a vain world to give themselves more perfectly to God. Witness the troops of Confessors and holy Virgins, who have renounced all earthly pursuits, and devoted themselves to the exercises of a solitary and religious life in imitation of their Lord in the wilderness and House of Nazareth. Witness the triumphant host of Martyrs, who have faithfully followed their divine Leader in his persecutions and sufferings, and have generously laid down their lives for his sake. Witness in fine the numbers of true believers, who have lived in the world, without being sullied with its vices, who in the words of the Apostle\* have used the world, as tho' they used it not; who have conversed with the world without being seduced by its maxims, or perverted by its customs. Nothing less than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ could have produced such samples of Christian heroism, or in the midst of impiety have erected such trophies to religion. The like graces are daily held out to us, and, if we faithfully co-operate with them, will infallibly work in us the same effects. The

\* 1. Cor. vii.

The fourth effect of the divine Mercy towards us is the grace of adoption. This grace we received, when in the waters of baptism we were regenerated anew, and admitted among the adopted children of our Father, who is in heaven. Being conceived in sin, we were born children of wrath, slaves of the devil, unfit for heaven, and unworthy of everlasting life. Such was our misery, such the misfortune of our state; the crime of our first parents had reduced us to it. But how honourable, how happy and how glorious is the state, to which the mercy of our Redeemer has since raised us! We are raised, I will not say, to the dignity of Angels, of friends or citizens, but to the dignity of sons of God, the heirs of God, and the co-heirs of Jesus Christ. Sanctified by the grace, and adopted in the sacred humanity of his adorable Son Jesus, we have now acquired a just title to the kingdom of God, the title of reigning with him for ever and ever in his glory. How exalted, how holy is the rank, in which the grace of adoption has now placed us?

How



How infinitely superiour to all the pompous titles and dignities the world has to boast of? By this, according to the expression of St. Peter,\* we are made partakers of the divine nature, since we thereby enter into an intimate relationship, and contract a special union with Jesus Christ, in as much as we make with him one mystical body, of which he is the head and we are the members. Hence our virtues being united with the virtues and dignified by the merits of Christ, they become highly acceptable to God, and worthy of a supernatural reward. The benefit of adoption being therefore so very great, great also must be the obligations it imposes on us, and great ought to be our care never to degenerate from the noble sentiments it inspires, and never to act unworthily of the character it stamps upon us.

To relieve our indigence and to succour us in our spiritual wants, Jesus Christ unfolds the treasures of his merits, and pours forth the riches of his grace in full measure.

\* 2 Ep. c. i.

fure. This is the fifth effect of God's liberal  
 mercy towards us. It is with this view,  
 that he instituted the holy sacraments,  
 which by his special ordinance continue  
 for ever in his Church, as the visible signs  
 and instruments of grace for the more ef-  
 fectual and more abundant sanctification of  
 our souls, For there it is, that our souls  
 are cleansed and sanctified by a more par-  
 ticular application of the merits of Christ;  
 there it is, that our sins are washed away  
 in the blood of the Lamb; there it is, that  
 we receive the infusion of fresh graces for  
 our increase and nourishment in a spiritual  
 life; there in a word it is, that we joyfully  
 draw the living waters, according to the  
 Prophet's expression,\* out of the fountains  
 of our Saviour. Thither all are invited,  
 and even pressed to come, that they may  
 share of the plenteous blessing: no distinc-  
 tion is made of sex, rank, or condition.  
 The fountain of mercy flows equally for  
 the poor and weak as for the rich and  
 strong. To partake of the life-giving  
 stream

\* Isaiah c. xii.

stream neither gold nor silver is required; a pure conscience and an upright heart give free access to every one, who truly believes and trusts in the mercies of his Redeemer.

It is principally in the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, that the goodness and mercy of our Saviour God so eminently appears. Jesus knowing, says St. John,\* that the time fixed for his passing out of this life was now come, having loved his, who were in the world, he loved them to the end. For the nearer he approached the term of his mortal life, the greater marks did he exhibit of his love for mankind. On the very eve of his crucifixion, when the united powers of men and devils were conspiring against him, being at supper for the last time with his Apostles, by an act the most solemn and the most expressive of his last sentiments, he bequeathed to us as his dearest children the greatest gift, that his wisdom could devise, or his love bestow. He bequeathed himself.

Under

\* c. xii.

Under the forms of bread and wine he gave us his precious Body and Blood for the food and comfort, for the strength and nourishment of our souls. Take and eat, said he, for this is my Body; drink ye all of the cup, for this is my Blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins.\* No words can more fully or more clearly express what he then did; and that the memory of what he did might be always kept up, he commanded his Apostles to do the same thing. § Then it was he instituted that great sacrament of love, that pure and clean oblation, which, as Malachi had long foretold, was to be offered up to God in every nation from the rising to the setting of the sun. Then was fulfilled that solemn promise, which Jesus himself made † to his disciples, when he told them, that the Bread, which he should give them, was his flesh for the life of the world, and that unless they eat of his flesh and drank of his blood, they should not have life in them.

In

\* Mat. xxvi.

§ Luke xxii.

† John vi.



In this adorable sacrament therefore Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is always with us, always present, and always dwelling in the midst of us. In his comprehensive designs of mercy it was not sufficient for him to descend from heaven, to assume our nature, to suffer thirst, labour, persecution, torments, agony and death for our redemption; he would moreover for our consolation remain with us in a most wonderful manner upon our altars, to feed, to strengthen, to sanctify our souls by a sacramental participation of his Body and Blood, really conveyed to us under the appearance of bread and wine. By this holy rite he continues daily to perform the function of his everlasting Priesthood according to the order of Melchisedeck; by this he renews the memory of his bitter passion, replenishes our souls with grace, and gives us a pledge of that future glory, which he has prepared for his Elect above. He that eats of this Bread, shall live for ever.\* Have we not

L then

\* John vi.

then just reason to exclaim with the royal Prophet, \* The Lord is gracious and merciful, and his tender mercies are above all his other works ?

These operations of the divine Mercy are truly great and singular. They are clearly specified to us in the holy Scriptures, and we believe them. But because they are done in silence and affect not our outward senses, they make the less impression, and excite no great sensations within our breasts. For such is our weakness, that the hidden and more wonderful works of grace pass almost unnoticed by us, while the least external favour out of the ordinary course of nature fills us with the most lively transports of wonder and surprise: as if the greatness of divine mercy were to be estimated not by what is really wonderful in itself, but by what appears new and wonderful to us.

When the children of Israel beheld the divided sea open to them a safe passage from the land of Egypt, when they beheld the

\* Psalm cxliv.

the manna falling down from heaven for their food, and waters gushing out of the dry rock to quench their thirst in the wilderness, every bosom heaved with sentiments of gratitude and every tongue was loud in their Maker's praise. Yet these were but types and figures of greater mercies reserved for the law of grace. The salutary streams, that flow from our Saviour's wounds, as far excel the waters of the rock, and the heavenly Eucharist as far excels the manna of the desert, as the heavens are above the earth; and the happiness of being delivered from the bondage of sin by the grace of baptism as far surpasses that of being delivered from the slavery of Egypt, as the everlasting joys of the next life exceed the transient joys of this.

The Mercy of God therefore is as boundless as himself. Eternal and infinite by nature, it began in the beginning of ages to manifest itself with wonderful beneficence to men, and has since continued to display such effectual proofs of benevolence to the afflicted as surpass all his other

works. This is the Mercy, that heals the broken of heart, that looses the bonds of the fettered, that supports the fatherless and the widow, that lifts up those, who are cast down, and executes judgment in favour of those, who suffer wrong.\* This is the Mercy, that so eminently appears in the very marks, which an offended God sometimes gives of his displeasure. For if he threatens, it is to move us to repentance, or if he strikes, it is to heal our souls. His chastisements are never equal to our sins, nor inflicted in the full rigour of his justice. With tender pity to those, who implore forgiveness, his anger soon relents and gives way to Mercy. For it is his peculiar property to have mercy and to spare. According to the height of the heavens above the earth he hath strengthened his mercy towards them, that fear him, says the royal Prophet, § as far as the east is distant from the west he has removed our iniquities from us. For as a loving Father hath compassion on his

\* Psalms cxlv, cxlvi.

§ Psalm cii.



his deluded children, so hath the Lord compassion on those, who fear him, because he knows our frame. He remembers the dust, out of which he formed us, he knows our days to be as grass, or as a flower of the field, which shoots up for a little while, and then sinks forgotten into earth again.

Our sins, 'tis true, ground a just apprehension of what our future lot may be. But even under that apprehension it is no small comfort to reflect, that sins the most enormous, when repented of, are no longer objects of God's indignation, but of his mercy. Let the wicked only forsake his evil way, says Isaiah,\* let him return by repentance to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; for the Lord is bountiful to forgive. Therefore however great may have been our sins, and however terrible the judgments of God may seem, we are never to diffide in his gracious mercy, we are never to despair. Humble at the sight of our wretched misery, and sincerely sorry

L 3

for

\* C. lv.

for the evil we have done, let us cast ourselves with a full and lively confidence into the arms of our heavenly Father, and we shall meet with strengthening comfort against all our fears.

O Father of mercies, O God of all consolation, how rich, how wonderful in goodness art thou! How singularly good and merciful to us! By the direction of thy special providence we are blest with the light of faith, while millions of our fellow-creatures lie buried in the darkness of infidelity; tho' redeemed by thy blood they never will partake of those saving graces, which thou hast prepared and preferably bestowed on us. And why is it, that we have been thus preferred, thus chosen out, and taken from the mass of unbelievers? Thy Mercy alone can tell. In ourselves we can discover nothing, that deserved so bright a mercy. Not to any merit of our own, but solely to thy goodness we therefore stand indebted, that we are now no more the sons of wrath, nor excluded from the inheritance of everlasting life. To

To make us still more sensible of the many and signal favours we have received from the divine mercy, let us here recapitulate what we were, by nature, and what we are by grace. We were the slaves of Satan; Jesus Christ has set us free: we were born the children of wrath; Jesus Christ has made us the sons of God: the gate of heaven was shut against us; Jesus Christ has opened it again: we were bewildered in sin, we sat in the shades of death; Jesus Christ has enlightened and put us in the way of everlasting life. Wherefore bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all the powers thou possessest praise his holy name. With grateful remembrance record the plenteous graces he hath heaped upon thee. He it is, who forgives thee thy sins, who heals thy wounds, who renews thy youth, who redeems thy life from destruction, and crowns thy days with the effusions of his most tender mercy.

O my Brethren, is it possible, that God should have displayed such shining marks of goodness towards us, and we remain

insensible of our obligations to him? That a God of infinite perfection should have assumed our nature to become our advocate, our brother and redeemer, and we repay his amiable, his adorable condescension with cold indifference and ingratitude? By sin we had provoked his severest justice, and he might have instantly cast us off, as he did the Angels, for our first offence. But it pleased the eternal Son to descend from heaven for us, and to descend to a state the most abject, and incompatible, as it seemed, with our ideas of unbounded majesty. What earthly king ever thought of descending from his throne to raise a rebel and ungrateful subject from the death he deserved? Shall Jesus Christ then become our Saviour, and we refuse to co-operate with him in the work of our salvation? Shall Jesus Christ have been born in poverty, shall he have lived in sufferings, shall he have died in agony upon a cross to save us, and we repine at every little suffering and inconvenience we meet with in his service? Jesus in the  
bowels



bowels of his most tender mercy has embraced us all, he excludeth none. Me therefore hath Jesus loved, may each one say with St. Paul,\* for me he hath been betrayed, for me he bled, for me he was crowned with thorns, for me he was nailed to a disgraceful cross, for me in obedience to his Father's will he resigned his breath.

Most gracious God, what return shall we make for this thy singular goodness towards us, or what have we to offer worthy of thy acceptance? An humble heart, we know, thou wilt not despise, tho' offered by a sinner. These are our resolutions.

First, with the most profound respect we will ever adore thy unspeakable mercy for having cast an eye of compassion on us, when we were sinners and undeserving of the least favour.

Secondly, with all the powers of our soul we will thank thee for having selected us out for mercy, while others remain unhappy victims of thy justice.

Thirdly, we will be careful not to abuse  
L 5 thy

L 5

thy

\* Gal. ii

thy preventing graces, which with so much goodness thou hast heaped upon us. What monsters of ingratitude should we be to insult the bounty, which so tenderly loves and careffes us? Or what punishment would not our guilt deserve, should we turn thy goodness against thyself, and sin with the greater boldness, because thou art merciful to forgive.

In the last place, we will beg in our most fervent prayers, that thou wilt strengthen our resolutions to serve thee, that thou wilt guard us from temptation, that thou wilt grant us the grace of perseverance to the very end, that when we shall breathe our last, thou wilt deign to receive our souls into the bosom of eternal rest.

These, Lord, are our present purposes; they are the effects of thy holy grace. Ratify and confirm what thy mercy has begun. Rather may our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth, than ever dare to profane thy holy name; and sooner may our right hand be cut off, than ever cease  
to

to be lifted up in prayer to thank thee for the past or to implore thy future favours.

And Thou, the most distinguished favourite of divine mercy, Mary the mother of our Lord, and Virgin ever immaculate, to whose maternal patronage we have been recommended by thy dying Jesus,\* cast down an eye of pity on us the banished sons of Eve; and since thy soul doth for ever magnify the Lord for the great things he has wrought in thee, vouchsafe to employ thy powerful intercession in our behalf, that thro' the merits of thy son Jesus we may partake of his plentiful mercies not only now, but more especially at the hour of our death. *Amen.*

\* John c. xix.

## DISCOURSE XI.

UPON THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

*Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgment is right. Psalm cxviii, v. 137.*

**G**OD being by nature the principle and essence of all perfection, to him all sovereign honour essentially belongs. Benediction, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and strength are his, says St. John,\* for ever and ever. To this sovereign honour, on account of the perfect knowledge he has of his own supreme excellence, he claims an eternal right, and that right no creature can divest him of. For he is the one, most high creator almighty,§ who sitteth upon his throne, and is the God of dominion, distributing to each one that, which belongs to him. ‡

Justice therefore in God is an absolute perfection, in virtue of which he necessarily claims due honour and glory from all his creatures. For this end he first created the heavens

\* Rev. vii.

§ Eccl. i.

‡ Jer. xxxii.



heavens and the earth, and all things in them. The heavens invariably continue to move in cheerful harmony according to the laws he gave them: the earth in obedience to his commands pours forth its plenteous fruits in due season: the sea, the winds and elements obey the voice and speak the glory of their great Creator. For this end he created the Angels. These Princes of his heavenly court constantly assist round his throne, and in a state of glorious immortality respectfully adore, praise, and glorify him from age to age for evermore. For this end he also created man, endowed him with the gifts of original justice, and placed him in the terrestrial paradise, that after a period of faithful service he might at length raise him to a supernatural enjoyment of his divinity in glory.

Now the same eternal Justice, which determines God to ordain all things to his own glory, moves him also to condemn whatever tends to his dishonour. For as he hath loved justice, so doth he hate iniquity.

iniquity.\* Hence flows that even justice, which he keeps in his rewards of virtue, and his punishments of sin. Sin is a wilful transgression of his holy law; it is an insult offered to his sovereign greatness; it is a daring violation of his supreme dominion over all creatures; it is an unnatural rebellion of a child against his father, of a servant against his king, of man against his Maker. The malice of sin arises from the depravity of the sinner's will, but its enormity is measured by the greatness of the infinite majesty it attacks, and can therefore be fully comprehended by God alone, who alone comprehends his own greatness.

The Angels were the first, who committed sin, and from the dreadful punishment they incurred thereby, we may judge how heinous must be its guilt. Those bright potentates of the firmament, being dazzled with the splendour of their superiour excellence, grew proud. They swelled with insolence against the power, which

\* Psalm xliv.

which had drawn them into life. From the exalted station, in which they shone, they vainly thought of advancing their throne upon a level with that of their Creator, and of becoming like to the most High.

Millions of the heavenly host wickedly conspired together in the audacious thought. But no sooner was the thought proposed and fully consented to, than struck by divine Justice, they fell like lightning\* into the burning lake, which was instantly prepared for the punishment of their pride. Not so much as a single moment was allowed them to recollect their thoughts, or to retract their crime: the same instant, that saw them guilty, saw them likewise accursed and miserable. Without the least regard either for their numbers or their dignity, or even for the honour, which their repentance might have done to the divine mercy, God in his justice hurled them down into the bottomless pit of fire and brimstone. Sitting upon his throne  
of

\* Luke x.

of majesty, he shall through all eternity discharge his bolts of vengeance on them. Kindled by his breath the flames of hell shall never cease to torment, and the smoke of their torments shall ascend for ever and ever.\*

How terrible are thy judgments, Lord God omnipotent! Who can but fear thy awful justice, O Lord of hosts? Innumerable Angels formed by thy own hand and formed in innocence, the brightest work of the creation were cast off by thee, and reprobated for ever. They shone with a glory more brilliant than the sun, and in a moment they were changed into fiends of darkness. For lifting themselves up in defiance of thy sovereign power, they were thrown down into the eternal pit,§ and from being the darling objects of thy complacency are become victims of thy eternal wrath.

To replace the fallen Angels God created man.† Man in the full possession of every earthly enjoyment, that his soul could  
wish

\* Rev. xiv, xx.      § 2 Pet. ii.      † Gen. ii.



wish, turned his thoughts upon the only object, that was forbidden him, and disobeyed the will of his Creator.\* Scarce had he committed the sinful act, but conscious of his guilt and ashamed of what he had done, he skulked from the light of day, and hid himself among the trees. But as he could not screen himself from the accusation of his own conscience, so neither could he fly from the pursuit of divine Justice. God appeared upon the spot, called him to an account, and condemned him to the most afflicting penalties, which his posterity to the latest period of time will sorely feel. Adam and his guilty consort Eve, having thus forfeited their title to heaven, were forthwith turned out of Eden, and driven to seek for bread in a barren land, where they were to meet with multiplied afflictions, till worn out with misery, they should at last die, and return to dust. Amidst such sorrows they might have found some consolation in the thought of dying, if upon their death their  
souls

souls could have entered into a state of blifs. But on account of their disobedience the gates of blifs were now shut against them, nor could those gates be again opened by tears, or by any penitential works, that either they or their whole sinful race could perform. The justice of God was not yet satisfied, nor was his anger yet appeased.

The sons of Adam continued to give him fresh provocations, and his Justice exhibited fresh instances of severe indignation. A deluge of vice had overspread the land. By the shameful corruption of their lives men were now become a disgrace to the very creatures, that had been made to serve them. In vain did the Almighty threaten, warn, and rebuke. His voice was not heard, his threats were not attended to, and his warnings not regarded. Touched with grief,\* as the Scripture expresses it, on account of their enormous crimes, he doomed them to destruction. For this purpose he opened the cataracts of heaven, being resolved to destroy not  
only

\* Gen. vi.

only man, but also the very birds, the beasts and reptiles of the earth, which had been created for his service. Incessant torrents of rain poured down for forty days and forty nights upon the earth; the waters rose fifteen cubits higher than the highest mountains, and, excepting the few with Noah in the ark, every living creature, which had moved upon the surface of the earth, perished in the deep. Without distinction of age or sex the whole race of Adam, saving eight just souls, were with a single stroke of the divine Justice swept off, and buried in one universal deluge.

The melancholy prospect of a desolated world struck the few survivors with equal fear and reverence for the Almighty. But to their children, in whose hearts the malignancy of sin still subsisted, the remembrance of it gave occasion of committing new insults. Sinners again conspired against God, and God again visited them in his wrath. In defiance of his power the proud tower of Babel rose, and swift was his Justice to descend upon the bold offenders.

offenders. A sudden confusion of tongues forced them to desist from their impious project, and they were scattered \* like vagabonds over all the earth. The confusion, that befel them, checked indeed their present insolence, but did not correct the malice of their hearts. An inbred propensity to evil accompanied them, wherever they went. Without shame or remorse they abandoned themselves to the most unnatural crimes, which cried to heaven for vengeance.

The men of Sodom and Gomorrha were of all others the most flagitious. § God rained down fire and brimstone to consume them. The whole country round to a certain distance was instantly on fire, like a blazing furnace. The towns of Sodom and Gomorrha and two other neighbouring cities with all the wretched inhabitants within them were totally reduced to ashes, and the execrated spot, where they once stood, was covered over with a lake of sulphureous water, which remains to  
future

\* Gen. xi.

§ Gen. xviii, xix.



future ages as a monument of God's just judgments in the punishment of sin.

Similar effects of God's severe indignation some time after fell upon the sinful Pharaoh and the whole people of Egypt.\* Those rivers, that were changed into blood, those dreadful thunders and lightnings accompanied with driving hail, that broke down all before it, those clouds of insects, that destroyed what the hail had spared, that palpable darkness, which blotted out the light of day, that general massacre in fine of their first-born, which the exterminating Angel made in one night's time over all the land, what are they but so many eloquent tongues, which once announced to Egypt the heavy vengeance of an irritated God, and still proclaim what they also have to fear, who imitate the obstinacy of that sinful nation? Those scourges made no salutary impressions on the heart of Pharaoh. With unrelenting fury he still persecuted the Israelites, who under the divine protection had retreated to the banks  
of

\* Exodus viii.

of the Red sea.\* There they lay encamped in a defenceless state with their wives and children; there the tyrant at the head of a numerous army overtook them. To the trembling fugitives destruction seemed inevitable; and then it was, that the arm of divine Justice interposed for their safety. Moses full of confidence advanced to the water's edge; a strong wind arose, the sea divided, and opened to him and his people a dry passage to the opposite shore. The Egyptians rushed headlong after them into the middle of the abyss. Moses stretched out his hand, and the waters closed. Shut up within the bosom of the deep Pharaoh there perished with his host, with his chariots and horsemen, leaving to the world a frightful instance, that God in the dispensation of his avenging justice has his times and moments, which no potentate on earth can either shorten or prolong.

Sennacherib, § the potent king of Assyria, had, like Pharaoh, blasphemed the Lord of hosts, and threatened ruin to the holy city

\* Exodus xiv      § 4 Kings xix.

city of Jerusalem. The exterminating Angel entered at night into his camp by the command of God, and slew by sudden death a hundred and eighty-five thousand of his troops, sparing only the tyrant's life, that he might fall soon after more ingloriously by the hands of his own sons.

Not less palpable proofs of his indignation has God frequently given in different ages and in different ways not against some particular delinquents only, but against whole families and nations. At what precise period a nation's crimes may amount to such a magnitude, as to draw some exemplary chastisement on them, no human opinion can ascertain. But with respect to many nations that precise period is clearly pointed out in the holy scriptures. Witness the destruction of the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires; witness also the overthrow and desolation of Jerusalem itself with the whole Jewish nation, in punishment of their sins, as is specified by the Prophet Daniel.\*

To

\* C. vii, viii, ix.

To an attentive reader, who considers the rise, progress, and downfall of modern kingdoms, and compares them with what the inspired writers mention of the ancient, it will appear, that the arm of divine Justice is not shortened. For God is immutable in his decrees, his hatred of sin is not lessened, nor is his manner of chastising sinners different from what it was. Wars, pestilence, and famine are still the usual scourges in the hand of God to punish a sinful people. But more inclined to spare than to punish, he for a while dissembles the provocations they give him; he exhorts, he threatens, and with patience waits, till the measure of their crimes be filled up: in angry justice he then pours out his vengeance on them. Heavy is the vengeance, that awaits the sins of a Christian people.

Christians are the chosen people of God: they are his sons by adoption, they are privileged with graces peculiar to themselves. The guilt of their transgressions rises in proportion to the graces they have been favoured with. That infidels and heathens,  
who



who have never been enlightened with the rays of truth, should run into every excess of corrupt nature, we cannot wonder. But when we see religion insulted in the very bosom of Christianity, and ridiculed by Christians themselves; when we see its duties neglected, its laws contemned, its truths impugned, and its mysteries disbelieved even by its own followers; or when in violation of every moral and religious precept we behold a deluge of abominations and vices bearing every virtue down before it, can we be at a loss to account for the public calamities that afflict mankind? The visible distress of nations groaning under the weight of public grievances, the convulsion of kingdoms, the disunion of states and empires, what are they, but the scourging strokes of divine Justice upon a wicked people? This is the bitter cup mentioned by the Psalmist,\* which is in the hand of the Lord, full of a strong mixture; it is poured out from one end of the world to the other; its dregs are not

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yet

\* Psalm lxxiv.

yet exhausted ; all sinners of the earth shall drink thereof.

These calamities no doubt are heavy and afflicting ; yet they are but passing evils, external only and medicinal pains, inflicted indeed by Justice, but tempered by the hand of Mercy to prevent more dreadful consequences. For there are other effects of divine Justice, there are other scourges, other penalties, which tho' not so perceptible to the senses, are more fatal to the soul. I mean the subtraction of those internal graces, which God refuses to those, who are obstinately disposed not to co-operate with them. I mean that deplorable blindness of mind, which shuts the sinner's eyes upon the evil he commits. I mean that unhappy hardness of heart, which under the guilt of most heavy crimes feels no remorse. I mean in fine that strange perversity of will, which leads to final impenitence. How many habitual sinners, hardened as a Pharaoh, or blinded as a Saul, neither see nor feel these more fatal scourges of exasperated justice? In-

toxicated

intoxicated with the fumes of worldly vanities they sleep their sleep, as David says,\* till waking in eternity they find nothing in their hands. The decisive stroke, which shall put a period to their mortal life, has been graciously delayed in expectation of their timely repentance. Heavy therefore must be the judgment, that awaits them, if in the end it shall be found, that the kind delay has only served to increase their guilt.

Exalt not your pride on high, says almighty God to sinners, and act not wickedly. § For when I shall have taken my time, I will judge even justice itself. I will search Jerusalem with lamps. † I will search and judge the justice of potentates and kings towards their subjects, the justice of magistrates and judges to the people, the justice of legislators to their fellow-citizens, the justice of parents to their children, the justice of masters to their servants, the justice of the rich towards the poor, the justice in a word

M 2

of

\* Psalm lxxv.

§ Psalm lxxiv.

† Sopho. 1.

of all men with respect to one another. During life men often fare very differently from what their virtues or their sins deserve; the wicked are frequently observed to prosper, while the good lie under a load of sufferings. That God therefore may appear just, as he is, in all his ways to men, he will at the last day demand from each one a public account of all he has done, and assign to each his due reward. How strict and solemn that account will be, we may already judge by the signs, which shall forerun that dreadful day.

For there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, says our blessed Saviour.\* Tremendous roarings of the sea, and great terrours from the heavens shall raise the expectations of men, and make them wither away with the apprehension of evils, that shall then come upon the whole world. Cruel and full of indignation, says Isaiah, § the day of the Lord shall come to lay waste the earth.

\* Luke xxi.

§ C. xiii.



earth, and to blot out the sinful inhabitants thereof. The stars of heaven, continues the Prophet, shall no longer diffuse their light, the sun shall be darkened in its rising, and the moon shall shine no more. Then shall the last trumpet sound,\* and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the summons of the Archangel all the dead shall rise. See the heavens now opening, see the sign of the Son of man now appearing in the firmament, a sign of consternation to all, who formerly dishonoured or betrayed it. Behold Jesus Christ the judge of the living and the dead coming in a cloud of terrific majesty, attended with thousands and thousands of Angels the ministers of his justice. The pillars of heaven tremble, and the foundations of the earth are shaken at his approach. For he comes § to bring down the arrogance of the mighty, and to make the pride of unbelievers cease. Before him all kings and nations of the earth shall then stand

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to

\* 1 Cor. xv.

§ Isaiah xiii.

to hear and receive sentence upon all their works.

To public view the books of life and death shall be opened, in which is faithfully recorded every thought the most secret, every word and action, which shall have been done, uttered or conceived by each individual man, from the first use of reason to his latest breath. There to each one's account shall be noted the graces, gifts and talents he received, and the use he made of them; the evil he committed or gave occasion to, the good he was obliged to, but neglected to do. Then shall the wicked call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and to hide them from the wrath of him, who sitteth upon the throne of his justice. But the rocks and mountains of the earth will be then on fire and shall melt away like wax before the flame, that is kindled for their destruction. The judge in justice to his own eternal laws will immediately pronounce the sentence, the supreme, the last, the irrevocable sentence, from which there

can be no appeal. The sentence shall be no sooner passed, than hell and death, as St. John says, \* shall be cast into the lake of fire, and with them also shall be cast all those, whose names are not written in the book of life. This is the second death, the conclusive stroke of divine justice upon unrepenting sinners.

Behold them plunged into the burning lake, enclosed on every side with raging flames, and howling with despair under the merciless tortures of insulting devils. Souls, created according to the image of God himself, and created for heaven, souls immortal and once sanctified with the blood of Jesus Christ, are by their final impenitence become objects of execration in the divine sight. As long as they were suffered to enjoy the light of heaven, they had wilfully continued in a state of enmity with God, and by their impenitent disposition of heart, which accompanied them to the other world, they still continue and for ever will continue in the same sinful

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state,

\* Rev. xx.

state, and are therefore condemned to torments as lasting as their guilt. Therefore are they gnawed day and night by the worm that never dies within them; therefore are they cast into outer darkness, into the bottomless pit, into unquenchable fire, where they shall for ever weep and grind their teeth in anguish and despair. The hand of divine justice shall for ever pour fresh torrents of gall and bitterness into their hearts, without being ever moved by their sufferings or softened by their tears. Those tears of fire, which they weep, shall never draw so much as a single look of compassion, nor shall the blasphemous cries of despair, which they send forth, be ever soothed by the smallest glimpse of hope. From the deep abyss which ever way they turn their eyes, eternity is before them, eternity is always present and always whole. Therefore in each moment they always feel a whole eternity of pains heaped at once upon them.

Unhappy souls! It is for their sins, and for their sins alone, that they suffer all this.

Infinite



Infinite therefore must be the heinousness of sin, since infinite is its punishment: for to infinite justice it would be repugnant to inflict a punishment more grievous, than the guilt deserves. Hardened indeed, my Brethren, must be our hearts not to be struck with fear at the thought of everlasting burnings, and dead must be the feelings of our souls not to be alarmed at such terrors of divine Justice. For since God has found guilt even in his Angels,\* what has not dust and ashes to apprehend? Who can consider the hatred, which God bears to sin, and not fear? Who can behold the effects of God's hatred to sin, and not tremble?

To Christians, who fondly flatter themselves with the encomiums of God's mercy without attending to the rights of his Justice, these truths may perchance appear unseasonable, too harsh as it is pretended, and too terrible for the present age. The same objection has been started long ago even to the great St. Austin. But to those

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who

\* Job c. iv.

who started it, the holy Doctor replied, that he advanced nothing more than the plain and simple truths of the Gospel; truths, which our blessed Saviour himself never ceased to enforce, and which the sacred penmen have been inspired to write down for our use and instruction. Our reply is obviously the same; We have neither written the Gospel, neither can we blot it out. Men of the present generation seem as little sensible of their eternal welfare, as sinners were of old, and consequently no less require the most striking arguments to rouse them up to a due sense of their essential obligations. For as it was in the days of Noah, says our blessed Saviour,\* so shall it be in the latter days before the coming of the Son of man. Unwilling to be either terrified or reasoned out of their evil ways, sinners will go on in the same manner as they did before the deluge, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, till sudden destruction overtake them. For in those days great wicked-

ness

\* Luke xvii.

ness will abound, the charity of many will grow cold,\* and faith will be hardly found on earth. §

To view the Christian world is there not reason to apprehend, that the days alluded to by Jesus Christ are either now at hand or not far distant? For when did the spirit of irreligion so generally pervade the body of mankind as in the present age? When were the principles of faith so universally laid aside, when were its mysteries less revered, or its precepts less attended to? Are not the eternal truths then to be announced, or is one part only of the Gospel to be published, and the other part to be suppressed? Is the sinner to hear nothing of those motives of fear, which our merciful Redeemer has suggested in the strongest terms, in order to dispose and soften his heart to compunction? Is he to be left silently to himself nodding upon the brink of everlasting ruin? Is nothing to be said for fear of alarming him, and no effort to be tried to make him sensible

M 6

of

\* Mat. xxiv.

§ Luke xviii.

of his danger, and to draw him from the frightful precipice?

O my Brethren, let us at least be solicitous for ourselves. If we are in sin, let us speedily repent; let us abhor and detest sin, because it is abominable to God: let us guard against sin, because it is hurtful to our souls: let us relinquish sin, because it exposes us, as long as we remain in it, to the continual danger of being cast into everlasting flames. If we have any time lived in a state of habitual sin, let us strive to atone for it by worthy fruits of penance. For our time is but short; the day of mercy is far spent, and a delay of repentance will hasten its decline. Death, we know not when, but death will soon snatch us from the world: the world to us will then end. Our soul shall be no sooner severed from the body, than carried before the tribunal of God to be there judged,\* and receive sentence according to its deserts. What sentence, my soul, will that be? Will it be to condemn or to save,

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\* Heb. ix.



to punish or to reward, to fix thy happiness, or thy misery? No man knows. But be what it will, we know it will be just, we know it will be final, we know it will be irrevocable.

In this perplexity of thought, let us be careful to keep up that humble confidence, which all should have in the divine mercy. Fear and confidence are two virtues never to be parted; they should always go hand in hand together. Fear without confidence would sink into despair, and confidence without fear would swell into presumption. Let us therefore both fear and hope: let us fear the anger of a just God, but let us hope in the mercy of a kind Redeemer. By uniting the sentiments inspired by both, we shall cheerfully pursue the path, which leads to eternal life.

Full of this consolatory hope, O Lord, we cast ourselves at the foot of thy throne, and humbly crave forgiveness. It is thy glory to forgive. Great, we confess, have been our offences, but still greater is thy mercy.

mercy. O cast us not off, lest the enemy should boast, that he has prevailed against thee. To be chastised and afflicted for our sins, we know is just. But rather chastise and afflict us here, that thou mayest spare hereafter. We are sorry from our heart, O Lord, for having sinned against thee. Have regard to our compunction, behold our tears ; compassionate our weakness, O God of bounty, and signalize thy greatness by pardoning the penitent. Magdalene wept and obtained forgiveness ; Ninive repented and was spared.

DISCOURSE

## DISCOURSE XII.

UPON THE INFINITY OF GOD.

*Great is the Lord, and of his greatness there is no end. Psalm cxliv, v. 3.*

**G**OD is infinite, not only because his greatness has had no beginning, and will have no end, but also because the perfections, which he is essentially possessed of, are every way infinite in their own divine nature. Infinity is here considered not as any distinct perfection in particular, but as an unlimited quality, which is common to God's perfections in general. The infinity of God is therefore the assemblage, the union and the actual completion of every pure perfection, that can possibly exist, so that to the plenitude of his all-perfect existence, no addition, no diminution and no change ever could or ever can be made.

God is infinite with respect to place; because there is no distance of regions, so remote,

and no space of the universe so extended, which he does not fill and infinitely exceed. God is infinite with respect to time; because before all time and before the beginning of ages he had a Being, and in that Being he will continue to exist, as he always was, immutable and eternal. God is infinite in all perfection, because the perfections, which constitute his essence, are infinite themselves. Infinite is his wisdom, infinite is his power, infinite is his sanctity, infinite are all his other attributes. In a word all perfection is his essence, which being infinite by nature, infinite of course is his perfection. For in an all-perfect Being there is nothing, and can be nothing, which has not the seal of infinity upon it.

Of this infinity of perfection in the divine nature there are Three, who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One.\* The Father by an eternal and comprehensive act of the divine intellect knows his own infinite perfections, and by

\* John I. Ep. c. v.

that



that act produces an inward and distinct object, which is the Word of his mind, the express image and most perfect resemblance of himself, or as St. Paul expresses it,\* the brightness of his glory and the figure of his substance. The divine Word being therefore the infinite and eternal object of the Father's knowledge, he has an infinite and eternal subsistence of his own, and is consequently a true and real Person distinct from the Father. But as he subsists in the same undivided unity of the divine nature, which by an ineffable generation is wholly communicated to him, he forms with the Father the self-same infinite and eternal God. ~~And~~ the Father, says he, † are One. Hence the Son, or the second Person of the Godhead is true God of true God; he is the light of light, the increated Wisdom, the radiant splendour, which eternally issues from the Father of lights. He springs from the Father without being preceded by him; because he now is, what he always was, and what

\* Heb. i.      † John x.

what he will always be from eternity to eternity. For in him eternally shines the whole incomprehensible glory of the Father without the least inferiority in point of time, dignity, or perfection. They are consubstantial, co-eternal, and equal in all respects.

From the comprehensive knowledge of these infinite perfections, which the Father and the Son behold in each other, proceeds a mutual and all-perfect love, which has the divine essence for its object: hence they communicate the whole essence of the divinity to a third Person, who is called the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is therefore a true and real Person, distinct from the other two, because from them both he truly and really proceeds as from one common principle, and thereby receives a distinct Personality peculiar to himself: and as he receives conjointly from them both the same individual nature, which they themselves have, he makes with them the same one, supreme, consubstantial, and all-perfect God.

This

This is the holy and undivided Trinity, to the knowledge of which no testimony of our senses, no voice of creatures, and no light of natural reason can lead us, but which all true Christians, guided by the light of faith, most undoubtedly believe. Religion has nothing to propose for our belief more adorable, more sublime, or more wonderful than the mystery of the blessed Trinity. Here human reason in humble silence submits to the authority of divine faith, nor does it presume to question the truth of God's word upon a subject, which in its very nature is infinitely above the reach of our comprehension. For if the nature of God were only such as the mind of man could comprehend, he would that moment cease to be, what he is, eternal, immense, and infinite.

By the light of revelation we therefore know, that in the purest unity of the divine nature, and in the most perfect equality of supreme majesty there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and tho' the three are really  
distinct

distinct in their opposite relations to each other, that they are but one God, one Lord, one Omnipotent, and one Eternal. For what we believe of the Father under the direction of divine faith, that do we believe of the Son, and that do we also believe of the Holy Ghost, without dividing the unity of essence or confounding the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. This distinction of Persons, this unity of essence, and this equality of greatness is expressed by our Blessed Saviour \* in the commission which he gave to his Apostles, saying, Go, teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For if the Three were not all equally God, incorrect had been the expression, which places them on a perfect equality with each other: or if they were not all Three the one and self-same God, obscure had been the commission, which directs us to baptise in their single name. But to tax the infinite wisdom of God either with

incorrectness

\* Mat. xxviii.



incorrectness or with obscurity in the very act, by which he commissions his Apostles to teach his undoubted truths to mankind, no Christian surely will presume. The beloved Apostle, who at the last supper had leaned upon the breast of his dearest Lord,\* expressly tells us,† that there are Three, who give testimony to heaven, the Father, the Word, and Holy Ghost, and that these Three are One. The three divine Persons therefore having all the same one individual nature, they have all but one and the same substance, the same will, the same power, the same wisdom, the same goodness, the same infinite excellence in all perfection. Hence the wonderful works of nature, which God has at any time wrought in the creation or preservation of the universe, are necessarily the joint and undivided produce of the whole blessed Trinity.

By the light God has stamp'd upon us we are enabled to form the most noble and the most sublime ideas of his divinity.

But

\* John xxi.

† 1 Ep. v.

But however noble and sublime our ideas may be of him, they fall infinitely short of what he is in himself. God is great, God is holy, God is powerful, God is wise; but his wisdom, his power, his holiness, and his greatness infinitely surpass every idea, we can form of them. For our ideas are always suited to the capacity of our understanding, which being imperfect and limited by nature, can never comprehend the infinite and unbounded essence of divine perfection. When from the magnificent works of the creation we raise our thoughts to the invisible Creator of them, or when, as the holy Scripture represents him, we contemplate the self-existing Lord of all things, sitting\* upon his throne of glory and shaking the heavens with the splendour of his majesty, or directing the motion of the stars and planets in the firmament by his omnipotence, or pressing upon the hills and mountains of the earth, and bending them down with the journeyes of his eternity, † we conceive but little of his

\* Isaiah vi.

† Bar. iii.

his plenitude of perfection. For God is not only all that, which his Prophets have so sublimely spoken of him, but he is infinitely more. He is infinitely more majestic, more beautiful, more holy and more perfect than the most enlightened mind of man can possibly conceive. Hence the holy Fathers in speaking of the nature of God unanimously agree, that it is easier to say, what he is not, than to say what he is. For of him we can say no more, than what he has been pleased to reveal, and even in that we can speak no otherwise, than conformably to the language, which he has taught us in the inspired writings.

When from the burning bush\* God called to Moses at mount Horeb, Moses humbly asked to know his name; to whom the Almighty answered in these sublime and expressive words, I am, who am. Under the beautiful simplicity of this concise sentence is conveyed the most noble, the most exalted, and most extensive idea of the divine essence: I am, who am. By  
excellence

\* Exod. iii.

excellence therefore God is He, who is: and what is it, that God is? Is he wisdom, is he justice, is he goodness, is he power, is he sanctity? Yes, my Brethren, God is all this, and infinitely more than this. For by the unlimited perfection of his Being he infinitely surpasses all, that can possibly at any time exist. By his very essence he necessarily and eternally exists. Before all things he is, and before all ages he has his Being; he is and was from eternity. All other things have received their being from him; they might or they might not have been. There was nothing, that required their existence; they had nothing in themselves, that could give them an existence. God alone is therefore infinite, and of God alone, it is truly said, He is: because within himself he contains the self-existing principle of life, the ever-flowing source and plenitude of Being. Ego sum, qui sum. *Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν.*

From hence it follows, that not only the perfections of God are infinitely above the perfections of creatures, but that even  
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the most shining qualities of creatures, when compared with those of God, are, properly speaking, nothing more than weakness and imperfection. By men fond of their own abilities this manner of speaking may perhaps be little understood. But on a subject so far above our comprehension, no wonder that the manner of conveying our sentiments should appear obscure, and even dry to such, as are indifferent in their search after knowledge in divine things. To speak by comparison seems a mode the most adapted to our understanding in this matter: and yet between an infinite and a finite Being comparison there can be none. When we turn our mind to consider the boundless magnitude of God's perfections, language furnishes us not with terms to express even the little we conceive of his supreme excellence. To form an idea worthy of uncreated majesty we should lift our thoughts infinitely above, all that is created: to see God, and to know God perfectly as he is in himself, we ought to see him with the

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eyes

eyes, and to know him with the intelligence of God himself. For none but God can form an idea, that shall be adequate to the perfection of God. Infinite wisdom alone can comprehend the greatness and the fullness of infinite perfection. Man can know no more of God, than it has pleased God himself to discover to him. The deeper we search into the unfathomed depth of the Divinity, the deeper we find it. The blaze of infinite majesty dazzles our understanding, and overpowers us with the splendour of its glory. We never form an idea more sublime or more worthy of the divine greatness, than when we silently bow down and acknowledge it to be above our comprehension. Reason by humbly submitting to the authority of revelation pays the most just and most glorious homage, that can be paid by mortal man to his incomprehensible creator.

My Brethren, when we reflect, that God within the bosom of his unbounded essence comprises all things, that are made or ever can be made, when we consider that the  
 vast

vast and beautiful extent of the visible creation in comparison to him is not so much as a single grain of sand, or a drop of water to the universe, or when we contemplate the innumerable and shining host of heavenly Spirits glowing with the rays and absorpt in the plenitude of his bright immensity, the mind is transported in a manner out of itself, and every power of the soul is hushed into silent raptures of astonishment. God is the impenetrable abyss of light, the unfathomable ocean of perfection. He is the beginning, the end and center of all we know, of all we see, and of all we hope for. Hence it is evident, how sovereign ought to be our esteem, our respect, and love for him, how ardent our desire to possess, and how prompt our zeal to serve him. That is the fruit we are to gather from this consideration.

1st. The consideration of God's infinite perfections will excite us to esteem him above all things; because we thereby discover, that in him are contained all the treasures of power, wisdom and goodness,

that an infinite Being is capable of. His power is our support, his wisdom is our guide, his goodness is our salvation. These are treasures truly valuable, because they are to us the source of endless happiness. All earthly treasures are frail and of short duration. If, unmindful of eternity, men confine their views to temporal advantages only, on what will they rest their hope, when they come to die? As from a dream, says the royal Prophet,\* they will then wake from their illusion, and too late perceive, that the objects they pursued were but imaginary goods, light and transient as visions of the night.

2dly. A lively sense of God's infinite perfections will inspire us with a respect for his adorable presence. God by his immensity is every where present; his eye is always fixt upon us. At all times therefore, and in every place it behoves us carefully to watch over ourselves in all we say and in all we do, as tho' we saw him with our very eyes. This respect should more particularly accompany

\* Psalm lxxii.



company us in our external works of piety and religion, because such works regard his immediate service. No otherwise than with the most profound respect should we presume to pray, because in prayer we truly speak to, and converse with God. Since I have once begun, said Abraham,\* I will speak to the Lord my God, tho' I am but dust and ashes. More awful still should be our respect as often as we enter the house of God, the house of public prayer. For if the Jewish Tabernacle, which was only a figure of what was to be, drew such respect from the people on account of the glory of the Lord, which rested upon its roof, how much greater respect is due to the Christian Sanctuary, where God himself resides sacramentally present upon our altars, as upon his throne of mercy, and how careful should we be to hold ourselves with due reverence before him? Even the glorified Saints in heaven, as St. John tells us, § fall prostrate before the Almighty, and lay their crowns

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at

\* Gen. xviii.

§ Rev. iv, v.

at his feet, when they approach to him upon his throne. The Seraphims themselves in their acts of homage, as Isaiah saw them,\* stand respectfully covered with their wings, as not sufficiently worthy to look him in the face. And shall mortal man presume in the holy place and in the very act of divine worship to assist in any other manner, than becomes an humble suppliant, adoring God in spirit and in truth?

3dly. An attentive consideration of God's infinite perfections will excite us to love him. For how is it possible, that a God infinitely good, infinitely amiable, and infinitely perfect should not attract all the affection of our hearts, the moment we know him. Of all the perfections we admire among creatures, there are none that can compare with those of the Creator; there are none so excellent, none so charming, none so worthy of our love. To love God with our whole heart and soul  
is

\* C. vi.

is the first and greatest of the divine precepts. \*

But when God commands us to love him with our whole heart, it is evident, that he will suffer no division and no rival in our heart. Hence the love he enjoins us is a sublime love, which lifts our souls above all earthly considerations; it is a holy love, which sanctifies the motives of our affections; it is a love of preference, which tells us to prefer his will before all things, and habitually disposes us to renounce every sensual gratification, and every worldly advantage rather, than lose his grace and friendship by a mortal sin. For whoever loves even his father or his mother more than me, says our blessed Saviour, § is not worthy of me.

Let us therefore love him with all the affections of our heart; for he is our Father: let us honour him with all the powers of our soul; for he is our God: let us serve him with all our strength; for he is our benefactor, and the rewarder of

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\* Mat. xxii.

§ Mat. x.

our virtues. Let all nations and all the people of the earth unite their voices in his praise, exclaims the royal Prophet,\* because his mercy is confirmed upon us, and his adorable perfections remain for evermore.

4thly. From the consideration of God's infinite perfections arises an earnest desire of seeing and possessing him in his glory. For we naturally wish to enjoy, what we are taught to consider as connected with our happiness. In God is united every desirable object, that can be conceived by the heart of man. In him, as in the plenitude of perfection, is centered all, that is great, beautiful, good, and holy : in him is the source of boundless delights, that flow with an infinite variety of charms without ceasing : in him the soul rests as in the center of supreme and perfect happiness, because the secure and full possession of all good leaves her nothing more to covet or enjoy. The immense, the eternal joys, which God imparts to his Elect in heaven,  
are

\* Psalm cxvi.



are therefore a subject of meditation equally sublime and comfortable. For at the same time, that they open to us a source of consolation amidst the miseries of life, that surround us, they also raise our views above all, that is earthly, and quicken our hope in the pursuit of what is eternal. The royal Prophet tells us,\* when he lifted up his mind to contemplate the mansions of the Blest, that his soul was in raptures at the lovely prospect, and ready to sink under the strong desire he had of beholding the living God. The hart† parched with thirst, and panting after the fountain stream for refreshment, furnished him with a comparison to express his sacred thirst, which nothing less than a torrent of heavenly charms could extinguish.

Hence appears the deplorable delusion of those Christians, who confine their views to the acquisition of a false happiness, and seek to allay their thirst in the turbid streams of earthly delights. Earthly delights, such as the world proposes to its  
 N 5 followers,

\* Psalm lxxxiii.

† Psalm xli.

followers, are too imperfect and too carnal to satisfy the cravings of an immortal soul. However innocent they may seem in themselves, they become hurtful by excess, and if they are criminal by nature, they moreover leave a sting, or an irksome emptiness behind them, which the world with all its enjoyments cannot remedy. Such enjoyments may indeed amuse and please the senses, while they last : but they last not long, and consequently afford no lasting happiness. The utmost they can do, is to create a desire, which they cannot satisfy, to excite a thirst, which they cannot quench, and to promise a satisfaction, which they cannot give.

This the wisest of men assures us of from his own experience, and this by a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost he has left written for our instruction. In the intemperate transports of his heart he had said,\* I will go, and abound with delights, and enjoy good things. He consequently refused himself no pleasure, that fancy could suggest, or his heart desire. But

\* Eccl. ii.

no sooner had he tasted of the fancied sweets, than he found them all imbittered with delusion and vexation of mind. He then turned his thoughts upon other projects; he built for himself stately palaces, he planted orchards, vineyards and spacious gardens, he heaped together prodigious treasures of gold and silver, the wealth of kings and provinces, such as none ever possessed before him in Jerusalem. But when he reviewed the works he had wrought, and considered what painful labours they had cost him, he was forced to own, that he had been labouring in vain: for he saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun. We are therefore told\* by our blessed Saviour, not to vex ourselves with useless solicitude about the perishable things of earth, but to be careful in laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven, that will never perish.

5thly. A due consideration of God's infinite perfections will awaken in us a

N 6

laudable

\* Luke xii.

laudable desire to serve him well. To serve a God infinitely good, infinitely great, infinitely powerful, and infinitely wise; a God, to whom kings themselves are as much subject as the meanest of their vassals, is an honour the most noble and sublime. Men often glory in the honour they have of serving some great prince or potentate of the earth, and fancy themselves supremely happy, if their services only prove acceptable. But what is the dignity of an earthly prince, what are the favours and honours of the most illustrious monarchs of the world, when compared with those of the most high God? A God infinite in goodness, in wisdom, in power and magnificence, admits the whole body of Christian people into his service; and as long as they serve him in spirit and in truth, he beholds them all with an eye of complacency, he accepts of every offer they make, he notices every pain they feel, he counts every step they take, he rewards every desire they form to serve him. Even a cup of cold water given in his name to a

disciple,



disciple, as he assures us,\* shall have its reward in heaven, and that reward shall be an additional weight of glory, which shall shine through all eternity.

Let narrow-minded worldlings then pride themselves on the passing honours and advantages they hold from their earthly lords and masters; on a better title will the faithful servants of Jesus Christ glory in the noble, in the holy and meritorious service of Almighty God. By a special Providence, my Brethren, we have been consecrated to God from our very infancy. By an act the most solemn we have been irrevocably engaged in his service, before we could possibly engage in any other. We then made a public renunciation of Satan and all his works. In the name of the three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we became Christians, that is, devoted servants of the most high God. Ennobled by this service, we aspire to honour and glory infinitely above what the world has to boast of, the honour of reigning

\* Mark ix.

reigning with God for ever in his kingdom. Can we then, my Brethren, think of retracting our promises, of breaking our engagements, and of degrading our character by making ourselves the slaves of sin? For whoever commits sin, says our divine Master,\* is the slave of sin. Let us be mindful, that we are Christians and devoted servants of the most High. Let us learn to prize the dignity and honour of the service we are engaged in. Let us in fine on all occasions remember, who it is we serve.

For we serve the immortal and invisible King of ages, whom the wide circumference of the globe and the immeasurable expanse of the firmament are too narrow to contain. Exalted infinitely above the bounds of this visible creation he reigns in the center of his heavenly kingdom, amidst the quires of Angels and Archangels; he sits supreme above the Virtues, the Dominations and the Thrones; he commands the Principalities and the Powers,

\* John viii.

ers, and they obey with trembling: he tells the winged Cherubims and Seraphims to go, and quick as the flashes of lightning they go and return, as his divine Spirit directs them.\*

Quicken us, O God, with the like holy ardour in thy service! For thou alone art great, thou alone art infinite, the source and plenitude of all our happiness for time and eternity. What the word offers is little more than a dazzling sun-beam, or a passing vapour, that glitters only to deceive us. Thou alone art magnificent and infallible in thy promises; thou hast promised to reward our slender services with a degree of glory in duration equal to thyself: the happiness thou bestowest, is eternal. If for the sake of enjoying the short dream of a fancied happiness on earth we give up the pursuit of everlasting joys in heaven, we act in contradiction to the dictates of our faith and reason.

Rise then, O Lord, and dispel the mist,  
which

\* Ezek. i.

which hitherto has clouded our understanding; enlighten our darkness and open our minds to the eternal truths, that we may at length rouse from our delusion and know thee, who art the beginning and the end of all.



## DISCOURSE XIII.

UPON GOD, THE SUPREME BEATITUDE AND  
END OF MAN.

*I am the first and the last, the beginning and  
the end.* Rev. c. xxii, v. 13.

**T**HERE is one supreme God, and there can be no more. He alone is omnipotent, and self-existing from eternity. In the full splendour of increated majesty God reigned alone before all ages immutable, immense, and infinite, ever blessed and ever happy in the boundless possession of all perfection. There then was nothing, and there had been nothing existing in nature, save his own infinite Being. God therefore is the beginning, the principle and source of all, that is. For what was once nothing, never could give existence to itself. To the creatures that are now in being, God might have given or refused existence, as he pleased. But having once decreed to create and draw them into life, he could create them for no other end,

end, than for his own honour and glory ; because to him, who is alone supremely good, supreme honour and glory can be only due.

At the commencement of time God produced a vast variety of creatures, which he has wonderfully arranged according to the order traced out by his wisdom, assigning to each its sphere, its mode, and period of existence, till they all return to their final destiny, the dust into its earth, says Ecclesiastes,\* from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it. Among the more noble works of God's hands there are his intelligent creatures, to whom he has given a spiritual being, capable of knowing and possessing him in his glory. Such are the Angels, and such are the souls of men. But before he would finally unite them to himself in a permanent state of happiness, he was pleased to assign a term of trial and probation to them both.

The Angels being all created at one time, and possessed of a more perfect nature  
than

\* C. xii.

thán that of man, required no great length of time, and no succession of years to ascertain their merit. Their trial therefore was but short, and they, who stood approved for their fidelity to God, were put into immediate possession of the bliss, for which they had been ordained. But to the souls of men, whose existence is successive, a longer term was consequently allowed, before their general union with the common parent of mankind. This term is composed of that fixed series of years, which shall pass between the beginning and the end of time. That series of years once ended, as end it will, the great day of eternity will commence. Then will the glorious train of predestined souls be gathered together, and return in triumph to the God, who made them: then will the whole united host of Saints and Angels for ever rest in the bosom of his divinity, the seat of supreme happiness and center of repose. For God hath made all things for himself, says the Wiseman,\* and created  
all

\* Prov. xvi.

all nations to his own praise, name and glory.\* But when the Scripture says, that God hath made all things for himself, it is not to be understood, as if God had need of any thing either to complete his happiness, or to fill up the measure of his essential glory.

The magnificent works of the creation manifest indeed the glory of their Creator, but increase not his happiness or perfection. Whatever perfections appear in creatures originally flow from him, as from the fountain of all good. For within the essence of his divinity those perfections are eminently contained, and have been so from eternity. In the beginning of time he spoke and they were made, he commanded and they were created.† Thus created they continue to reflect the rays of his omnipotence to men, but add nothing to the inherent lustre of his glory. However bright may seem the objects, that are enlightened by the sun, the sun receives no increase of light from the brightness.

\* Deut. xxvi.

† Psalm xxxii.



ness they reflect. The glory therefore, which God receives from his creatures is only accidental, and consists in the homage and obedience they pay him. Let us but survey the harmonious system God has established in the universe, and we shall find it so wonderfully arranged and combined together, that all things in the order both of grace and nature ultimately tend to the glory of their great Creator.

The world is made for man : but man himself is made for God. The beautiful, the rich and plentiful productions of nature are by a bounteous providence ordained for man, as long as he sojourns on earth. For God has placed him over all the works of his hands, says the Psalmist,\* and has made subservient to his use not only the beasts of the field, but the birds likewise of the air, and the fishes of the sea. But lest in the midst of earthly delights sensual man might chance to forget the more noble end of his creation, and sit down contented with a temporary happiness, the wise

\* Psalm viii.

wise disposer of all things has given us an insatiable longing after something more. He has given us a soul, which no sensual delights can content or satisfy; a soul which breathes after purer joys and happiness more lasting; a soul immortal in her nature, and by grace exalted far above the earth, which she considers as her place of exile, and therefore sighs incessantly after that heavenly country, where she may be fully satiated with the glory of God himself.

Thus conformably to the views of Providence this lower world answer two important purposes equally useful to man, and honourable to God. First, it serves man for his present residence, where as long as he remains, he is supplied with every thing necessary to support him in his way to heaven. Secondly, it exhibits a noble, extensive scene, in which we behold the works and adore the hand of our Creator. By viewing the bold and elegant strokes of art, that appear in some finished work of architecture, we become acquainted with the architect himself, in as much as we become acquainted with

with his talents and abilities, by which he is best known; so from beholding the visible beauties of the creation, says St. Paul,\* we come to a knowledge of the invisible Creator of them. The wonderful structure of the heavens, the stately stability of the earth, the inimitable simplicity of nature in all her works announce to us a God infinitely great in power, wisdom, and goodness.

Hence we learn, how the material and inanimate parts of the creation refer to God as to their last end, since by their steady obedience to the laws he gave them, they daily fulfil the end they are appointed for. This is the persuasive voice, the silent eloquence of inanimate beings, by which they proclaim the glory of God, and powerfully call upon us to concur with them in promoting the same end. The end, for which man has been created, is infinitely more perfect and sublime; it is to know God, to see God, and to possess God in a supernatural state of glory for

\* Rom. i.

for eternity. This is the end, to which our souls constantly aspire; for this is the end, out of which it is not possible for them to be happy.

Our souls are the living and animated images of God himself; they are signed with the light of his divine countenance. By the grace of adoption they even partake of the divine nature, according to the expression of St. Peter,\* they are therefore in a restless state, till they rest in God, the center of their life and happiness. Conscious of the noble dignity, to which God has raised them, they wait with longing expectation for admittance into the joy of their Lord, into the eternal sanctuary of bliss, into the unchangeable abode of Saints and Angels, into the everlasting kingdom, which a God of infinite power and glory has prepared for his chosen friends. Let us conceive, if we can, whatever that kingdom contains, great and ineffable; the depth of its riches, the height of its glory, the extent of its joys, the eternity of its duration.

What

\* 2 Peter i.



What ecstasy, what raptures shall we feel, when entering into possession of that blessed kingdom we shall see the king of glory presenting himself to our view, sitting upon his throne, and unfolding to us all the charms of the beatific vision in full splendour? The veil of mortality, which now conceals him from our sight, shall be then removed; we shall see him face to face, as St. Paul tells us,\* we now know him only in part, but then we shall know him perfectly, even as ourselves are known. Yes, my Brethren, we shall then perfectly possess God, and in God the plenitude of all good without the mixture of any evil: in God we shall possess the plenitude of glory without measure, the plenitude of joy without grief, the plenitude of peace without fear, the plenitude of happiness without end. That is to say, our souls in possessing God shall be eternally replenished with more delights, more joy, and more happiness, than the most capacious heart of man can conceive or desire.

O

Then

\* 1 Cor. xiii.

Then shall the tear of affliction be for ever wiped from their eyes ; no sorrowful sigh, nor moan shall be heard ; \* no longer shall they stand in need of the sun for their light by day, or of the moon by night : for the splendour of God himself shall be unto them for an everlasting light, † and the brightness of his glory shall make it one unclouded and one eternal day. Immersed in the rays of his divinity, they shall be clothed with the glory of God himself, and like stars they shall shine thro' all eternity. § Fixed in the contemplation of his adorable perfections they shall for ever drink of the plenteous bliss, which flows † like a torrent of purest chrystal from the throne of God. They shall be always satiated, but never cloyed ; always desiring and always enjoying the full completion of their desires ; always delighted, and always drawing fresh transports of delight from the living fountain of felicity itself. Such are the images of celestial happiness, as they are exhibited to us in the inspired writings ;

\* Rev. xxi. † Isaiah lx. § Dan. xii. † Rev. xxii.

writings; they are sublime, they are rich, they are inviting. But as they are taken from material objects, and drawn in such colours, as are requisite to render them palpable to our senses, the idea they convey, however high it may seem, falls far below the real excellence of the objects they represent. For the joys of heaven are too spiritual, too pure and transcendent to be understood by us, as they are in themselves, or to be fully manifested by the figurative help of description. St. Paul had been rapt to the third heaven,\* whether in body or out of the body he knows not, but there he learnt such hidden truths, as it is not possible for man to utter. For no eye has seen, says he, and no ear has heard, § neither can any man in this world conceive, what God has prepared for him in the next.

The suffering Christian here feels himself exceedingly comforted at the thought; he forgets his griefs, and tho' worn with pains and labour, he rejoices in the hope, that

O 2

he

\* 2 Cor. xii.

§ 1 Cor. 2.

he shall be one day no less happy in body than in soul. For the same Apostle assures us, that these our feeble bodies will be also glorified in heaven. By nature, says he,\* we are mortal, and subject to corruption, but at the last day in the general resurrection of the dead we shall rise incorruptible and immortal. We have sown in dishonour, but we shall rise in glory; we have sown in weakness, but we shall rise in strength. For this our corruptible body shall put on incorruption, and this our mortal body shall put on immortality; so that it shall become a spiritual body, endued with the same shining qualities, that adorn the glorified body of Jesus Christ himself. In this last and glorious exaltation of man from earth to heaven will be literally verified the words of the royal Prophet,† when he says, that God has displayed his magnificence above the highest heavens, that he has exalted man above all his works, that he has raised him to a state little inferiour to that of Angels, that he has crowned him

\* 1 Cor. xv.      † Psalm viii.



him in fine with honour and everlasting glory.

This, my Brethren, is the supreme beatitude of man; this is the happy end of God's elect. In the bosom of his divinity, as in their center of happiness, they eternally repose, having no other employ than to enjoy their happiness, and to sing the praises of their munificent Creator for ages evermore. This is the noble and exalted end, for which we have all and each one of us been created. This is the end, we should always keep in view; to this every other project ought to be subordinate, because on this our eternal welfare entirely depends, and without it nothing but endless horrors can ensue: this will last when all our worldly hopes shall fail; this will for ever flourish, after heaven and earth and even time itself shall have passed away. Let us then attentively consider, and in our most recollected thoughts ponder well the excellency of this our end, and we shall learn to esteem it: let us dive into the

depth of its treasures, and we shall labour to attain it.

1st. Let us consider the excellency of our last end. The excellency of the end, we are made for, is to be estimated from the sublimity of its object, from the transcendency of its joys, from the extent of its duration. Its object is the supreme and incomprehensible felicity of an all-perfect God: its joys are one continued torrent of delights, which flow from the beatific vision of a God unfolding himself to his dearest creatures, in all the charms of infinite beauty, splendour, and magnificence: its duration is no other than the boundless eternity of a God, immutable and immense in the nature of his existence. This, my Brethren, is the kingdom of everlasting glory, the happy region of the living, and by excellence the joy of the Lord, as it is called by our blessed Saviour,\* and therefore compared to a precious jewel and a hidden treasure. It is called a treasure, because it comprises  
within

\* Matt. xiii.

within its bosom all, that is precious to the soul of man; and it is a hidden treasure, because at present it lies concealed from our corporeal eyes, and is known only to few by the light of faith.

We, my Brethren, are of the happy few, to whom this heavenly treasure has been revealed. Great is its value; the treasures even of the whole world are no more than a few grains of sand in comparison of it. For what will it profit a man, says our blessed Saviour,\* to gain the whole world, should he by the bargain lose his soul, or what could he receive in exchange to compensate his loss? Can a fleeting shadow hold the place of real good, or can time ever equal eternity? Did riches, pleasures, dignities or honours ever bring, or can they bring certain happiness along with them? Yet how many Christians in the world unfortunately seek no other? Blind delusion! They seek for happiness, where it never can be found, and they seek it not, where it is only to be found. Are ye not, dear

O 4

Christians,

\* Mat. xvi.

Christians, a part of the deluded number? Has not example, vanity, or passion drawn you out of the path of virtue? O call to mind, what lights, what graces, what instructions you have received; and consider how little consonant with reason your conduct must appear, if notwithstanding that, you run with the insatuated children of the world after vanities, and weary yourselves in the toilsome round of unprofitable and sinful pursuits. For in effect what are your earthly views, which so engage and agitate your minds, what are they but vanity, since they have nothing solid and nothing lasting in them? What are they but deceitful vanity, since instead of leading you to the seat of happiness they draw you by false appearances to a greater distance from it? No, my Brethren, it is not for this world, that God has made us: if he had, he never would have stamp'd upon us the image of himself. In the world all is perishable, we ourselves are but strangers and pilgrims in it: there is nothing sufficiently great on earth to content and make



us happy. All earthly enjoyments are too short, too carnal, and too imperfect to satisfy a spiritual and immortal soul. We are made for heaven.

2dly. Therefore let us turn our views to those eternal mansions, where the only treasures are, that can equal our desires, and content our soul, because they are the treasures, that will never fail.\* They are the treasures of everlasting life, which our heavenly Father has stored up for us in the treasury of heaven, and which upon our entrance there he will pour into our bosom without end or measure; treasures incorruptible and immense, which no rust shall tarnish, no moth devour, and no thief ever steal away.† To a participation of these inestimable riches God has called us from the very first moment he created us. Between the unbounded majesty of God and the littleness of man infinite was the distance; but that we might approach him, as near as our nature would admit, he breathed into us a soul,§ which he then

O 5

destined

\* Luke xii.

† Mat. vi.

§ Gen. ii.

destined to a supernatural state of glory, and prepared for us a throne within the very sanctuary of his heavenly kingdom. He at the same time infused into our soul an instinctive knowledge of the sublime end, for which he had ordained us, and impressed us with a fond desire of being united to it. For there is our treasure; and where our treasure is, there also will be our heart.\*

All things follow the natural tendency, that was impressed upon them in their first creation. Earthly bodies tend towards the center of the earth, fire rapidly ascends towards the sphere of heaven, our souls by a similar impulse tend to God, the sphere and center of their repose. During this our mortal life we discover no more of God, than is sufficient to stimulate that inbred desire we have of being hereafter united to him in his glory. At present the splendour of his divinity is hidden from our sight, it gleams, as it were, thro' a cloud from afar, and we only  
know

\* Mat. vi.

know it by the rays it spreads upon the beauteous works of the creation. But when the bright day of eternity shall shine upon us, and heaven shall open its treasures to our view, then shall we behold, then shall we know and possess our God, as he is in his plenitude of glory. Then will the plenitude of his power beam out upon us, because we shall be exalted to a sublimity of bliss, which human nature by its own powers never could have risen to. Then will the splendour of his wisdom be transfused into us, because in him, as in a perfect mirror, we shall clearly see and know all things. Then will the plenitude of his magnificence be communicated to us, because in the affluence of his kingdom, we shall rejoice, as in a boundless ocean of delights. Then will his goodness, his mercy, his sanctity, his love, and all his infinite perfections concur to our happiness, because from the inexhaustible treasures of his divinity we shall be replenished with the perfection of all good. His joy will be our joy, his peace will be

our peace, his riches will be ours, his kingdom and his happiness will be also ours: so that, as St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians,\* God will be all in all, he will reign in us, and we in him for ever and ever. Wherefore know thy dignity, O man, cries out the great and eloquent doctor St. Leo, and since thou art made partaker of the divine nature, be careful not to disgrace it by acting in any manner unworthy of thyself and God.

Therefore not content with a general and ineffectual desire, such as most Christians feel of being happy, let us proceed to facts, and by steady virtue let us strive to gain our last end, in which only few succeed. For of the many, who are called, only few are chosen. § In this point it is of consequence to remember, that we have not only an eternity of happiness to acquire, but an eternity of misery likewise to escape. Were a state of insensibility or of annihilation the only consequence of our losing God, all then would end with us in the grave,

\* C. xv.      § Mat. xx.



grave, and after death we should have nothing more to enjoy, nothing more to fear, or to hope for. But even in that case unpardonable would be our folly to resign our title to heaven for a trifle, for a meer nothing. Great was the foolishness of Esau,\* to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage: but greater would be ours to exchange eternal joys for a moment's pleasure, an everlasting substance for a fleeting shadow.

But since our souls are immortal and destined to exist for ever, we cannot now fail of being happy without being positively miserable. For at the same time that our blessed Saviour promises everlasting life to those, who do good things, § he announces likewise everlasting punishment to those, who do evil things, and die guilty of them. Having then so much at stake, so much to gain and so much to lose, such happiness to hope for, and such pains to fear, no endeavours surely can be deemed superfluous to secure success. For we must fight and conquer too, before we can be crowned.

Straight

\* Gen. xxv.

§ John v.

Straight moreover is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life,\* you must therefore strive to enter, says our blessed Saviour. For the kingdom of heaven is not granted to every one, who says, Lord, Lord, but to him only that does the will of God, who is in heaven. The will of God is, that we keep his commandments. Our divine Master therefore teaches us, § that to follow him, and to enter with him into life, we must take up our cross and deny ourselves. To take up our cross, what is it, my Brethren, but patiently to bear the afflictions of life, to submit to persecution, to injuries and affronts for Christ's sake, and cheerfully to undergo the occasional labours and inconveniences, which the duties of our Christian profession must sometimes put us to? To deny ourselves, what is it, but to reject those forbidden objects, those gratifications of our passions, and those dangerous occasions of sin, which are incompatible with our obligations to God?

Corrupt

\* Mat. vii.

§ Mat. xvi.

Corrupt nature may perchance reply, the world will cry aloud, and false friends may suggest, that such a system in practice would render life very uncomfortable and gloomy.

The objection, my Brethren, is a meer illusion, first invented by the enemy of our salvation, and then adopted by a false philosophy to discourage virtue, and embolden vice. For a system, which has been established by the Wisdom of God himself, cannot be either so uncomfortable or so gloomy, as the world would make it. For tho' it enjoins a strict obedience to the commands of God, yet it neither forbids a rational use of innocent amusements, nor excludes the cheerful comforts of social life. By the graces, which accompany the evidence of a pure and upright conscience, its yoke is rendered sweet, and its burden light. The system is no other, than what we all embraced at baptism, and promised to observe to our latest breath; it has the promise of eternal life for its reward. Blessed are the clean of heart, says Jesus Christ;

Christ,\* for they shall see God; blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy; blessed are they, who thirst after goodness, for they shall be satiated; blessed are the poor in spirit, and they, who suffer for justice sake, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. These are comfortable assurances, these are cheering tidings to all, who feel themselves any ways burdened or oppressed.

The followers of the world in their temporal pursuits have no such promises to trust to; and yet to gain their earthly ends they cheerfully undertake more painful labours, than are usually required to gain heaven. What fatigues and dangers does the soldier and seaman undergo? What servile attendance and inconveniences must the courtier submit to? What continual sacrifices of time, of ease and sleep, and frequently even of health and fortune are they also obliged to make, who wish to gain the good graces of the world? Of these the world speaks, and these the world approves;

\* Mat. v.



approves ; because the world loves its own, as St. John tells us.\* But shall Christians, shall the professed followers of Jesus Christ adopt the same sentiments and language ? Shall they presume to censure and rebuke their best and nearest friends for exerting the same zeal from a principle of duty to serve God, as others do from habit to serve the world ? St. Paul, who was certainly guided by the Spirit of God, speaks a very different language.† From the example of those, who were candidates for popular applause, he takes occasion to exhort the Christians of Corinth to exert a similar zeal for the salvation of their souls. They, who contend in the public games, says he, refrain from every thing, that may be hurtful to them ; and yet it is but a corruptible crown they contend for, whereas ours is an incorruptible one. Since ye have therefore entered the race, stretch forward with a holy emulation, and so run, that ye may gain the prize.

For a further encouragement to our exertions

\* C. xv.

† 1 Cor. ix.

ertions in the course of virtue we are moreover to reflect, that in the service of Almighty God there is nothing lost, nothing unrewarded. Not so much as a single hair of our head shall perish. For our heavenly Father \* beholds every step we take, every wish we form, every effort we make to serve him, and will reward us for it: for being a just judge, he will give to each one according to his works. § In the same proportion, as we measure out to him, he will in return measure out to us again. † And what is the measure he will give? A more enlightened knowledge of himself, a more perfect sight of his incomprehensible perfections, a more abundant communication of his heavenly treasures, a more eminent degree of glory amongst his Saints. For tho' all shall shine like stars, yet as one star in brightness differs from another star, says St. Paul, || so shall the glorified bodies of the Elect rise in a different degree of glory according to each one's personal deserts. Powerful, my Brethren, is the motive, and

\* Mat. vi.    § Mat. xvi.    † C. vii    || 1 Cor. xv.

and great is the incitement we here have to honour God with a generous heart, to serve him with a cheerful heart, and to love him with our whole heart.

Great God, since thou hast been pleased to create us for thyself, O grant we may always seek thee; and as thou art our beginning, our last and only end, so mayest thou always be the first object of our thoughts, the pure motive of our actions, and the only term of our desires. Thou hast made us for an end the most sublime, the most happy, and divine. That we may obtain this end, thou hast furnished us with means the most efficacious, that thy wisdom could devise, or thy power execute: thou hast given us a soul and body to know and do thy will; thou hast made the universe to serve us, thou hast descended in Person upon the earth to instruct us, thou hast died upon a cross to save us, thou hast risen from the grave, and ascended into heaven to encourage us. O never suffer us to be either unmindful of thy past favours, or unworthy of thy future mercies!

Strengthen

Strengthen us, O Lord, in our purposes to serve thee, and by thy holy grace help us on in our way towards thee: increase our faith, that we may know thee, enliven our hope, that we may seek thee, inflame our love, that we may find thee: that when the labours of this our mortal pilgrimage shall end, we may finally rest in thee, and with thy Elect eternally possess, adore, and praise thee in thy glory. *Amen.*



## DISCOURSE XIV.

UPON THE SAINTS OF GOD.

*Praise ye the Lord in his Saints. Psalm cl.*

**G**OD is wonderful in his attributes ; he is wonderful in all his works. God is also wonderful in his Saints.\* The prodigies and wonders he has been pleased to work by their hands, and the operations of his holy grace, which he has so eminently displayed in their shining virtues, justly excite our admiration, and equally claim our praise. The testimony of holy writ leaves us no room to doubt of the miracles wrought by the Saints of the ancient law. The new testament recounts the stupendous miracles wrought by the Apostles and first Disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself declares † that they, who believe in him, shall be privileged with the grace of performing such miraculous works, as he had done, and even greater than any he had done. These singular  
privileges

\* Psalm lxxvii.

† John c. xiv.

privileges, thus granted to the Saints, mark not only the favour but the power also they enjoy with their Creator. To me, O God, are thy friends exceedingly honourable, says the Psalmist,\* their principality is exceedingly strengthened, their numbers surpass even the sands of the sea.

How glorious, my Brethren, is the heavenly kingdom, wherein the Saints reign with Christ, and partake with Christ of the glory, that issues from the unbounded splendour of God, which is revealed in them! Lift up your thoughts, and in imagination behold the interiour court of heaven open to your view. Behold the Lord of Hosts, as he was seen by Isaiah, § sitting upon a sublime and elevated throne, filling the whole extent of heaven with the brightness of his glory. Around him millions and millions of blessed Spirits attend with profound reverence to honour his supreme dominion over all creatures, and to carry his adorable mandates to the uttermost bounds of the creation. Behold the innumerable

\* Psalm cxxxviii.

§ C. vi.

merable host of Apostles, of Martyrs, of Confessors, of Virgins and other Saints, all clothed with resplendent robes of immortality, and distinguished by the brightness of their respective virtues, all crowned with glory, and all shining like the sun\* in the sight of God. These were once pilgrims upon earth like ourselves, once engaged in the same service, once fighting under the same banner, and hoping for the same crown. These are they, says St. John, † who are come out of great tribulation, who have washed their robes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God in everlasting bliss, and He, that sitteth upon the throne, shall dwell among them. They now rest from their labours, they reign with Christ for ever in glory, they are the chosen favourites and friends of God in his heavenly kingdom. They are likewise our friends and brethren in Christ; they are members with us of the same Church of Christ, and are in communion with us.

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\* Mat. xiii.

† Rev. vii.



This communion we profess, as often as we recite the Apostle's creed. They have received the crown, which we are striving for; they are in possession of the happiness, which we hope for. And as they know their happiness and still remember the struggles they underwent to obtain it, the charity they have for us their brethren and fellow servants here below, must naturally prompt them to wish us the same happiness. They therefore intercede with the Father of mercies for us, that through the merits of his Son Jesus our only Redeemer he will grant us his efficacious helps of salvation. For since they partake of the beatific vision, their love of God is become more inflamed and more perfect: consequently their zeal for his holy service among men, and their charity for their neighbours still labouring on earth, must in the same proportion be also increased and perfected. When on earth they were eminent in sanctity; in heaven they are now raised to an eminent degree of glory, the reward of their virtues. Their  
example



example points out the virtues we are to practise, each one in his own line of life, and their glory raises our expectation of being one day happy with them in a participation of the same crown. The Saints are therefore worthy of imitation and veneration.

By veneration I understand honour and respect. Men in dignity and power claim respect from their fellow creatures; Sovereigns claim due honour from their subjects. Such is the dictate of right reason, sanctioned by law in every well-ordered government. This honour and respect is exhibited by such outward tokens as usage and good order has established. A disrespect or an insult offered to the King's friend, whom he wishes to honour, is usually thought to be offered to the King himself. Now the Saints, as has already been observed, are the chosen friends, the select favourites and honoured courtiers of the King of heaven; honour therefore and respect is their due on that account.

But when I say honour, I mean with

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the holy Catholic Church a relative and inferiour honour, such as may be paid to the friends of God without lessening the honour due to God. The honour due to God is sovereign and independent, because God is the sovereign and independent Lord of all things. This honour is expressed by the act of religious sacrifice, which is solely consecrated to the worship of the Divinity. The honour we pay the Saints is a limited and dependent honour, because however great they may be in heaven, they are still limited in their mode of existence, and however rich they may be in glory, yet they possess nothing but what they have received from God thro' the merits of Jesus Christ their Redeemer. This honour is shown to the Saints, when we beg their prayers in our necessities, when we implore their patronage and powerful intercession in our behalf, with God their Lord and our Lord. This inferiour, this limited and relative honour has been paid to the Saints in heaven by the Church militant on earth from the early and purest times

times of Christianity, as a learned Protestant Divine ingenuously confesses.\* “It is  
 “confessed, says he, that the lights both  
 “of the Greek and Latin Church, S. Basil,  
 “S. Gregory Nazianzen, S. Gregory Nyf-  
 “sen, S. Ambrose, S. Jerom, S. Austin,  
 “S. Chrysostom, S. Cyril of Jerusalem,  
 “S. Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, S.  
 “Fulgentius, S. Gregory the Great, S. Leo,  
 “and more, or rather all, after that time,  
 “have spoken to the Saints and desired  
 “their assistance.”

To desire the prayers of the Saints in heaven is certainly no less consistent with Christian piety, than to ask the prayers of the faithful upon earth. St. Paul asked the prayers of the Thessalonians.† To address God in holy prayer is undoubtedly a religious and meritorious act, and to address him in favour of those, who stand in need of his divine assistance, is moreover a charitable act. Now when we desire the Saints to pray for us, we desire nothing more, than that they will exert

P 2

this

\* Mr. THORNDIKE, in Epil. p. 3.    † 1 Ep. c. v.



this charitable, this religious and meritorious act in our behalf. By such an invocation of the Saints to join with us in devout prayer before the throne of mercy, so far are we from lessening the honour due to God, that we even magnify it the more. We petition nothing independent of the divine will, we desire nothing of them, but what we and they humbly ask of the Father of lights,\* from whom every good gift and every perfect gift is to come. We indeed honour the Saints by addressing ourselves to them for their patronage in our wants, but that honour is ultimately referred to God, whom we praise and honour in his Saints.

To the Saints, as members of the same Church, it is still said, ask and you shall receive.† The great things they have done in the divine service, the labours they have undertaken, the conflicts they endured, the victories they won, and the virtues they practised, give them a title to ask and to receive. For themselves they have

\* James c. i.

† Mat. c. vii.



have nothing more to ask. They possess all they wish. They possess God, they are happy, they are satiated with glory. They ask then for us. When called upon they offer their petitions solely for us, whom they ardently desire to see partakers with them in the same happiness and the same glory. St. James assures us,\* that the assiduous prayer of a just man availeth much. How much more efficacious will be the united prayers of the blessed in heaven? At their request a more easy access will be open for us to the fountain of all good, which had otherwise remained shut against us. Unprofitable servants at the best, and often unworthy to be heard by reason of our numerous offences against God, we naturally look round and apply to such mediators as are qualified and willing to intercede for us. With this view we often recommend ourselves to the prayers of our friends and brethren here below. Can their prayers be less efficacious, or their charity less active, when translated to a

P 3

state

\* C. v.

state of perfect happiness? By such a translation can the sense of feeling for others, or the desire of relieving others in their miseries be extinguished in them? If the Apostles and Martyrs could pray for others, says St. Jerom,\* when in their mortal state they were solicitous for themselves, how much more ready will they now be, when crowned with victory and triumph? Moses § by his prayers obtained pardon for six hundred thousand seditious Israelites: Stephen the first Martyr in imitation of his Lord interceded for his persecutors: † and shall their prayers be less efficacious, when they are now reigning with Christ in his kingdom? St. Paul affirms, that the two hundred and seventy-six men, who sailed with him, were saved from shipwreck on his account: ‖ and now since he is dissolved and glorified with Christ, is he to close his mouth for ever, and not to open his lips for those innumerable souls, who by his preaching have embraced the Christian faith? Eliphaz the Themanite  
and

\* Adv. Vigil. § Exod. xxxii. † Acts vii. ‖ Acts xxvii.

and his two friends had sinned against God ; they offered sacrifice in atonement for the offence. But neither their sacrifice nor their prayer could find acceptance without the intercession of holy Job.\* Job prayed for his friends and obtained their pardon. In the book of Zachary § is recorded the Angel's prayer for Jerusalem and the cities of Juda. Michael the Archangel, as we find in the Book of Daniel,† exerted his tutelary power in behalf of the captive Jews, and while the good Tobias‡ prayed and buried the dead, his prayer was presented to the Lord by Raphael, one of the seven Spirits, who assist before the throne of God. Hence in the Revelations it is said,¶ that the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the Saints ascended up before God from the Angel's hand. St. Peter being in prison, and the faithful praying for his deliverance, as is related in the Acts of the Apostles,|| Almighty God was pleased to hear their prayer, but it was by the ministry

P 4

of

\* Job xlii.      § C. i.      † C. x.      ‡ C. xii.  
¶ C. viii.      || C. xii.



of an Angel, that the prison gate was opened, and the Apostle delivered from his chains.

Such being the evidence of holy writ on this subject, is it possible to doubt, whether the Angels and Saints in heaven interest themselves or not about the welfare of their brethren on earth? Whether they know what passes here below, or can be made acquainted with our wants? The joy, expressed in heaven\* upon the conversion of a sinner from his evil ways, leaves no room for any such doubt. For no one can rejoice at an event, which he knows nothing of. The Blessed in heaven therefore know our wants, and are ready to solicit at the throne of mercy for our relief. It is our interest then to invoke their patronage. They are happy favourites of the most high God, they are our natural advocates. To the Angels God has given a commission § to watch over and to guard us from harm. It is our duty then to place a confidence in them. They are the  
holy,

\* Luke c. xv.

§ Psalm xc.



holy, they are the living and glorified images of Almighty God himself; they are therefore entitled to a due respect and veneration from us. God has made them worthy of respect by exalting them to glory; he has made them worthy of veneration by connecting them so closely with himself. They are sanctified with his sanctity, they are glorified with his glory, they are immortal with his immortality. He has chosen them from amongst thousands to reign with him for ever in heaven, they are his heirs by adoption and the co-heirs of Jesus Christ in his kingdom of glory. He therefore cannot be indifferent to the respect or the disrespect they meet with from their fellow-creatures. In honouring the Saints, as has been explained, we honour God himself; in desiring the Saints to pray for us, as all Catholics do, we desire them to give the homage due to God, and in giving it to remember us.

Wherefore lift up your hearts, my Brethren, to the heavenly mansions, and with the Psalmist praise the Lord in his Saints.

Praise his bounty in the treasures of his graces communicated to them; praise his sanctity in their holiness of life; praise his power in their gift of miracles; praise his justice in their crowns of glory. The Saints in the order of grace had received great talents from their munificent Creator, and by a steady attention to their Christian duties they have improved those talents to their everlasting glory. To the gifts of the Holy Ghost infused in their souls they added the brightest virtues; by co-operating with the grace of their divine Redeemer they persisted faithful to their trust, they fought a good fight, they finished their glorious course, and thereby deserved the crown they now possess. In them the grace of Jesus Christ has continued thro' every age to triumph over the Prince of darkness. Drawn by the sweet attractives of divine love, the white-robed train of Virgins renounced the soft allurements of flesh and blood, while the bold champions of religion stood in defiance of the severest attacks, that the powers  
of

of error could make against their faith. Under the direction of the holy Spirit millions of devout Christians have left the world to follow the evangelical counsels of voluntary poverty, chastity and obedience in a religious state; freely renouncing every worldly interest, that birth or fortune might entitle them to expect, they addicted themselves to the penitential rigours of an obscure, of a frugal and humble life. By a licentious or an unbelieving world these have commonly been held up as the objects of pity and ridicule,\* and their mode of life has been deemed a folly. But behold how they are counted § by true Wisdom among the sons of God, and among the Saints is their happy lot. Thus far we praise, admire and venerate. Let us now consider what we are to imitate.

Churches in every part of the Christian world have been erected to the living God, but they are erected under the patronage of some favourite Saint. The Church has instituted various festivals in honour of the

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Saints

\* Wisdom c. v.

§ Ibid.



Saints during the course of the year, and commanded them to be kept holy. The intention of these religious institutions is not merely to commemorate the names of the Saints, to implore their patronage, or to give God thanks for their glory, it is moreover to excite the faithful to an imitation of their virtues. A bare rehearsal of the graces they received, or of the wonders they wrought, a barren speculation of the merit they acquired, or of the glory they possess would avail us little, unless we should at the same time be roused up to a holy emulation of imitating their virtues. For the Saints are the models of true virtue; on earth they were the masters of Christian perfection, the shining ornaments of religion. Their time of probation is now over; they are in full possession of their reward in heaven. Their labours are at an end, they have gloriously finished their career, they are now at rest, eternal light shines upon them.

We, my Brethren, are still in our mortal pilgrimage, struggling for victory in the midst



midst of difficulties and perils. We have perils from the world and from false brethren; we have difficulties from our weak selves as well as from the duties we have to perform. But these difficulties and perils are no other, than what the Saints have had before us. For it cannot be imagined, that the Saints were exempt from the weakness peculiar to human nature, or that they had no struggles to undergo, and no difficulties to encounter in the practice of virtue. If such had been their condition, where would have been their victory, where would have been the merit of their patience, or of their fidelity to God? For where we have nothing to overcome, there can be no victory: where we have nothing to suffer, there can be no occasion for patience. No, my Brethren: the way of virtue must necessarily appear to every child of Adam more or less rough and thorny. Grace alone and the habit of doing good can render it smooth and pleasant. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, says Christ,\* and they who offer

\* Mat. xi.

violence

violence bear it away. Narrow is the gate, and strait the way, which leads to life.\* Without force and struggle no man can enter there. By such pious violence the Saints opened to themselves a passage, and pressed forward into life. For there is no ground to suppose, that the laws of the Gospel were relaxed, or that the nature of things was altered in their favour; that the devil had no power to molest, that the world had no blandishments to tempt, and concupiscence no sting to hurt them. We need but open the history of their lives, and we shall find them men made of flesh and blood like ourselves, equally susceptible of pain and pleasure, equally liable to the impressions of joy and grief, equally subject to the common infirmities of human nature. Many of them had strong passions to subdue, great contradictions to undergo, stubborn difficulties to remove, long and troublesome temptations to struggle with. Many of them lived in the midst of a perverse world, where they were  
equally

equally to guard against the alluring smiles of seduction, and to withstand the frowns of persecution, slander and oppression. Contempt, ridicule and reproach were employed by turns either to expose their simplicity to the laughter of a false philosophy, or to shake their constancy in the practice of their religion.

But because they were agreeable to God, and their steady principle of duty rendered them greatly so, it was necessary, as the Angel told Tobias,\* that temptation should prove and perfect them. Aided by divine grace they persevered and conquered. Well grounded in the principles of faith, and warm with the hope of everlasting life, they were ever studious to serve the God, who made them; and ever zealous to fulfil all, that he commanded them. Not a single tittle of the law they knew could be overlooked, but that the whole and every part of it must be faithfully and punctually accomplished. In theory and practice they knew it to be impossible to  
serve



serve two masters, and to divide their heart between the world and God. For God had commanded them, as he commands us, to love him with the whole heart. With all their heart they therefore sought to serve and please him in all they did. All the affections of their heart breathed his honour, and every undertaking was levelled at his greater glory. By diligent and fervent prayer each day was consecrated to God, whilst their turn of mind and the general conduct of their lives was formed upon the maxims and guided by the spirit of the Gospel. Humility, meekness, purity of body and mind, charity, patience, benevolence, in a word every gospel virtue crouded in to form their Christian character. Such, my Brethren, is the example they have left us, such is the pattern they have drawn for our imitation. For we have the same glorious end to pursue, if we wish to be eternally happy; we serve the same God, we have the same precepts to fulfil, the same duties to perform, the same Gospel to follow. We have in fine  
nothing



nothing more to do, than what the grace of God, if we are only in earnest, enables us to do, nothing but what men like ourselves and in the same circumstances of life have already done.

For in every station and in every condition of life there have been persons eminent for their holiness and purity of manners. Through every rank of age and sex from the cottage to the throne, thousands have shone, and by their bright example have displayed the specific virtues, that adorn and sanctify each state. For sanctity excepts no person whether married or single, it excludes neither poverty nor wealth, neither servitude nor power, neither infirmity nor strength: it is annexed to the ordinary duties of a Christian life. There needs no change of state to seek the means of sanctity. For the beauty as well as for the support of civil society different degrees and ranks are necessary; yet each one in his rank is called unto holiness, says the Apostle,\* because such  
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\* 1 Theff. c. iv.

is the will of God, who gives us all the graces necessary to accomplish it. Of the Saints some have been called to an active, others to a contemplative life. Some have sanctified their souls, while they served the state; some by their temperate and beneficent use of riches have edified the world in the midst of plenty, while others have relinquished all they had in the world to follow Christ more perfectly. Some directed all their study to the sanctification of their own souls only in solitude and religious retirement, while others in imitation of the Apostles, have exerted themselves for the sanctification likewise of others by preaching and teaching. But in this they all concurred, that charity is the bond of perfection, and that there can be no true sanctity, where the observance of the whole Evangelical law is not complete. For whoever breaks but one of the commandments,\* says our blessed Saviour, altho' he should observe all the rest,† he will have no place in the kingdom of heaven. No  
pride,

\* Mat. v.    † James c. 2.

pride, no lust, no intemperance, no impurity, no revenge, no injustice, no sloth, nor any other vice whatever, however palliated it may seem by a glare of blended virtues in the same character, can find admittance there. One single blemish is enough to spoil the finest painting; the deficiency of a single link breaks the golden chain of perfection and renders the whole imperfect.

The Saints therefore are perfect models for our imitation, because without the mixture of any vice they shine with the purest rays of religious virtues. By a strict attention to themselves on all occasions, by shunning all dangerous commerce with a sinful world, by pious austerities and rigid self-denials, many have preserved their baptismal innocence without a blemish, and have thereby left us the example of integrity and penance united together. Such was the Baptist, such were his parents Zachary and Elizabeth.\* Many, after having been seduced by the allurements of sin, or betrayed by passion, have risen more glorious

\* Luke i.



glorious from their fall. By a sincere conversion of their hearts to God, by the tears of true repentance, by the means of mortification and penance, they have expiated their former crimes, and become more conspicuous for their virtues, than they had been noted for their errors. Such is Magdalen, such is Peter and St. Paul. Paul from being a violent persecutor became a zealous Apostle. Peter had the weakness to deny his divine Master. With bitter tears he bewailed his sin, and for his fervent faith deserved to have the whole flock of Christ committed to his charge.\* Magdalen had yielded to the most wanton excesses of corrupt nature. She bathed the feet of Jesus Christ with her tears, and on account of her great love of God, great sins were forgiven her. §

Christian, if you have sinned, and by sinning have forfeited the love of your Creator, look up to the Saints, and you will find amongst them many examples of true repentance, many claiming your notice and

\* John c. xxi.

§ Luke c. vii.



and imitation. To have sinned was once also their misfortune, the gush of passion and effect of human weakness. To repent sincerely of their sins was their glory, the fruit of holy prayer, and the triumph of divine grace. By their example you will learn to rise from your fall, to walk on steadily in the path of virtue, and not to fall again. By their example you will learn to abhor the guilt, to renounce the habit, and to shun the occasions of sin. By their example you will learn to use the arms of penance, to subdue your passions, to curb the sallies of rebellious nature, to be zealous in your Christian duties, to persevere in the exercise of a well-regulated piety, and to sanctify your souls. Implore their patronage, copy their virtues. By experience they know the difficulties you labour under: they once felt them. They are ready, they are active to assist you by their prayers before the common Father of Mankind. They know what it is to see God, to possess God, and to enjoy God in the plenitude of his glory. They  
ardently

ardently wish to have their friends, their brethren, and fellow Christians partners with them in the same glory.

Wherefore rouse, my Brethren; and ye that sleep, rise from the dead, as the Apostle admonishes,\* and Christ will enlighten you. Tread the footsteps of the wise, who are gone before you. Be ye also wise unto salvation, and by redoubling your diligence in the practice of good works redeem the precious time you have unfortunately lost. Death will soon come, when time for you will be no more. At the close of a virtuous life happy will be the death, that shall open to you a free passage into that blessed kingdom, where you may see and love, and praise and rejoice, for ever and ever.

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\* Eph. c. v.

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